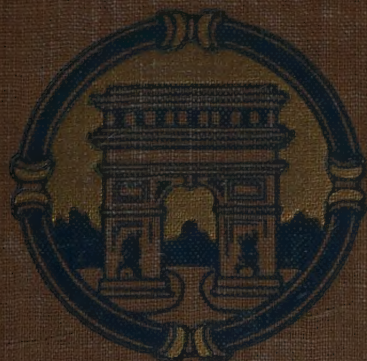


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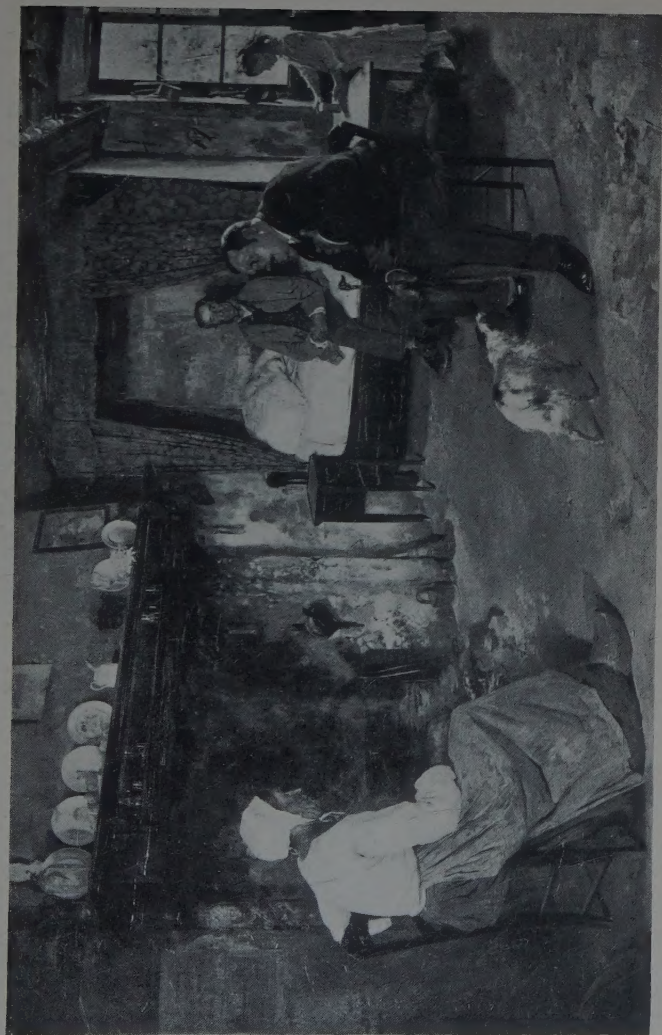
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THE PEASANT AT HOME — THE CANDIDATE

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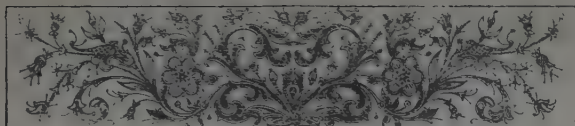
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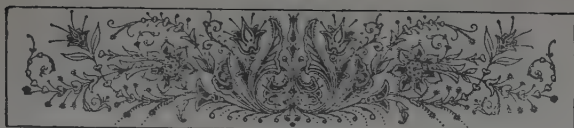
CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
FRENCH RURAL AND PROVINCIAL LIFE . . .	1
CHAPTER II	
PARIS AND PARISIANISM	28
CHAPTER III	
SOCIAL DIVERSIONS AND DISTINCTIONS . . .	58
CHAPTER IV	
THE ARMY AND THE NATION	87
CHAPTER V	
SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION . . .	112
CHAPTER VI	
NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	147
CHAPTER VII	
HOME-LIFE IN FRANCE	173

55532

	PAGE
CHAPTER VIII	
PEASANT AND ARTISAN	202
CHAPTER IX	
THE PRESS AND THE PEOPLE'S COLLEGES	229
CHAPTER X	
THE PARISIAN LECTURE AND SALON	250
CHAPTER XI	
THE "LITTLE PEOPLE" OF PARIS	264
CHAPTER XII	
ORGANISED PHILANTHROPY AND PUBLIC ASSIST- ANCE	283
INDEX	307





ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
THE PEASANT AT HOME — THE CANDIDATE <i>Michelena.</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
BLESSING THE WHEAT <i>J. A. Breton.</i>	16
THE PARDON OF SAINT ANNE (BRITTANY) <i>Guillou.</i>	42
A REVIEW AT LONGCHAMP	88
CONSECRATED BREAD <i>Dagnan-Bouveret.</i>	114
THE REFECTORY <i>A. Bouvin.</i>	120
THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES	130
THE FRENCH ACADEMY	148
THE FOYER OF THE OPERA-HOUSE	170

	PAGE
A SEASIDE SERVICE <i>Edelfelt.</i>	190
AN OUTDOOR MEAL <i>Zimenez.</i>	206
GLEANERS <i>J. A. Breton.</i>	262



FRENCH LIFE IN TOWN AND
COUNTRY



FRENCH LIFE IN TOWN AND COUNTRY

CHAPTER I

FRENCH RURAL AND PROVINCIAL LIFE

AMONG the nations of the earth there exists no more striking contrast than that between the people of Paris and the people of France. While the capital is a political furnace, where all sorts of conflicting ideas and opinions are continually boiling with such a rage of effervescence that the inhabitants, unaccustomed to the sense of calm and security, work, dance, and rest on the brink of an ever-menacing revolution; in the provinces town life drags through its monotonous days, absorbed in dull provincial interests, and rural life knows no other changes or menaces than those of the seasons. We distribute to each race certain broad characteristics, and trace out for them in all circum-

stances an ideal of conduct from which, if they will be true to their blood, they must not deviate. And so we are all decided upon the general French characteristic, excitability, forgetting the immense provincial differences that are to be found in the people of France as well as elsewhere. The heavy Flemish natives of Picardy, large eaters, deep drinkers, hard workers, slow of speech, somewhat coarse and unperturbed, are as French as the natives of Latin Provence, garrulous, sober, alert, and exuberant. They are not less French than the wily, hard-bargaining Norman, who eats and drinks as much, but brings a clearer brain into business, and may always be relied upon to get the better of his neighbour in all transactions; or the dreamy Celt of the Breton coast, the thriftless slave of superstition, with brains to spare as well as prejudices, but not intended by nature as a pillar of the Temple of Wisdom. Not less French the rich green midlands than the white and sunburnt south, the champagne vineyards eastward, and the rocky Cévennes rolling southward. Could anybody differ more from the morose and inhospitable Lyonese, in whose eyes every outsider is the enemy against whom he sedulously barricades his doors, in whose esteem the pick of humanity is the prosperous silk-merchant, than the pushing, loud-mannered Marseillais, with what he would fain have us take for his

heart so aggressively upon his sleeve, emotion so transparently transient ever on the surface, subtly disguising self-interest and calculation ?

For every diversity of character equal diversity of scenery — from the Alpine grandeur of the Dauphiny land to the beautiful lagoons of the Marais ; the Vendean plain washed by the long blue roll of the Atlantic ; Provence, land of salt lagoons and dead old cities of Greece and Rome ; the central provinces, with their lovely rivers and chestnut woods ; Celtic Brittany, half English ; Normandy, with its glorious capital, one of the fairest of France ; the radiant cities of the Loire, French river of romance ; the bright and witching little kingdom of Béarn, exquisite Rousillon, with its old hum of wars and troubadour songs, its delicate sweetness of herb and leaf and bloom, its quaint old towns breathing of Spain, and its high air of legend ; the east, with its mountains and dense pine forests, up to sunnier Ardennes. And the *patois* of these so different districts are not less distinct than the scenery, the note of town and province, and the characteristics of each race. Shelley most seriously wrote that there was nothing worth seeing in France. Even the tourist will find more to delight his eye in going from one department to another than he will find place to record in the most voluminous note-book. Let him only content himself with such a province as Touraine, with its

rich and pleasant landscape, its castles of undying interest, its river of thrilling associations. Or let him wander in summer amid the cherry orchards of the Jura country, with the rampart of mountains above the pine-tops and the touch of Swiss beauty around ; or dream away the present in musing upon forgotten Mediterranean glories among the ruins of dead Provençal cities between the grey-green silver of the olive and the sapphire waters beyond the broad grey river bends.

It is true that the townsman all over the land is largely governed by a need for excitement, and having, as a rule, no personal initiative to enable him to minister to it, he contents himself with looking toward the capital with envy, and devours the newspapers from Paris in eager expectation of the "something" he is in daily hope of happening. But whatever does happen in Paris rarely makes itself felt in the intellectually sleepy, industrious provinces ; thanks to which wide-spread spirit of commercial and bucolic denseness to the inflammatory influences of the capital, France thrives now as she throve before the war, when at a word she could produce funds to pay off an enormous indemnity, without flinching or hesitating.

When you travel in the country or through small French towns, you are struck with the gaiety, intelligence, and good-will of the people

and of the little shopkeepers, and with a certain unintelligent stiffness, pretension, and moroseness of the middle class, whose ambition it is to pass for the aristocracy, or at least for *des gens de bonne famille*. As these pretensions are rarely in keeping with their actual fortunes, these ambitious provincials, the victims of the political follies born of hostility to the Third Republic, think fit to garb themselves in the unbecoming vices of ill-humour, rancour, and idle pride. These they conceive to be the adjuncts of noble birth. If the fathers have refrained, the sons are certain to announce themselves, sooner or later, by titles of their own choosing. The general preference runs to count and viscount, though baron is not despised. I have known of a respectable middle-class family in the provinces, where the eldest son, a lawyer, is content to remain a republican, and the second son, an officer, a gentleman of aristocratic instincts, eager to profit by the present enthusiasm for the army in anti-governmental circles, calls himself a count. The humorous part of the situation lies in the fact that the wife of the plain Monsieur is not satisfied with her lot, since destiny, ruled by her brother-in-law's will, has given the latter a title ; and so at the recent marriage of that military worthy, the newspapers spoke of M. le Comte giving his arm to his sister-in-law, Madame la Comtesse, while the

disgusted republican elder brother stayed in the country, indifferent to the self-appointed glories of his relatives.

Within late years, tennis parties are beginning to introduce a little stir in certain select circles of small provincial towns, where these entertainments are still regarded as novel ; but, speaking generally, the dulness of such centres in France cannot be surpassed anywhere. Social life is at as low a level as intellectual life. Few books are read, fewer still are discussed. The very aspect of the streets—with their sealed doors, shut persiennes, sullen absence of neighbourly trust and geniality, high-walled gardens—is morose and incommunicative. They wear, however, as compensation, a look of distinction, not infrequently accompanied by a picturesque charm. Should a river roll in view, or a little street slope down to a busy quay, where the washerwomen kneel and lend mirth and colour to the scene, while above, an old historic castle, high against the sky, on a dusty square, or the grey of Gothic stone and delicate spire add a hieratic note to the quaint picture you forget the unfriendly reserve of those barred and blinded houses, you forget the somewhat aggressive coldness and inhospitality of their front, in recognition of the tempered brilliance, the graceful and distinguished effects around you. Mingle then with the market-folk, and listen to their

speech—pleasant vocables, rendered pleasanter still by vivacity of gesture and vividness of gaze ; neat peasant women, in spotless caps and sabots, who look all the merrier because they are so hard-worked ; tanned, wrinkled faces, that smile as they did in youth, hard-set, but not unkindly, in the rapacity of commerce ; responsive to a joke, unflinching in the teeth of trouble, not destitute of a promise of comfort in life's softer hours—though softness is the very last quality they betray. A genial hardness is, perhaps, the dominating character of the French peasant woman's expression : it would never be safe to trust in the hope of finding her head napping and her heart too wide awake. But if she is not soft to others, she is implacably hard to herself. Her industry is amazing, and only less amazing is her resourcefulness. A more competent woman does not exist anywhere. Nothing of a dreamer, she is contented with her lot, provided only there is neither thriftlessness, waste, nor idleness about her. She will willingly work for four, if the men will honestly work for one. And while the men loiter and squander substance and health in the wineshops, this gallant creature continues to labour and save and scold, to deprive herself of small comforts in favour of others—a son, a daughter, as the case may be ; and, thanks to her, the country ever prospers.

Country life is, of course, far less dull than provincial town life ; less unneighbourly, and less destitute of all the charities of existence. For one thing, nature is the eternal friend, benefactor, and instructor of man. The thousand vulgarities of towns are forgotten in the midst of her bounties. A man who lives in bucolic silence, watching the seasons and counting new-born things, dreaming of oats, of crops, of fruit, is essentially the superior of his fellows who dwell amid the sordid details of small towns, commerce, and rivalries, the gossip and drivell which make a spurious animation in the circles of the provinces. There are diversities among the type *hobereau* (a kind of French squire), as among all other types in France and elsewhere. Many years ago I travelled through a charming south-western province, furnished amply with letters of introduction. I well remember the extraordinary contrast between two families of *hobereaux* I once visited. A relative of the small squire, who lived in a dull, quaint little town, drove me out to see her bucolic son-in-law and his bucolic parents. The family was described to me as "exceedingly rich." We entered a brilliant bit of park and avenue on a hot afternoon in July, drenched with the dews of heat, athirst from the dust of the broad, long white road. On the *perron* stood the young couple and their parents to receive us. The

bride was gaudily and hideously attired in yellow and brown satin and silk ; the groom in grey, with straw hat and leggings, more appropriately adorned the landscape. He was a heavy-eyed, high-complexioned, silent youth, who seemed at ease and happy only in the society of his most beautiful dogs. To them alone did he sometimes discourse in heavy undertones, while he surveyed me furtively under his lashes in unmistakable awe, but addressed me no word. His father-in-law looked like a farmer or a yeoman, and cracked small jokes. He quizzed his son, who blushed the hues of fire, and his son's mother-in-law, who ingeniously strove to make me believe that she did not understand him, and he nudged his daughter-in-law in a way she must have resented. Without exaggeration, I have never met a more peasant type of country gentleman in my life. His wife was a simple, ill-mannered person, who talked chiefly about the weather. The grounds were lovely, the orchard a splendid dream, but the floors of the "chateau," as every country-house in France is pretentiously called, were mere unvarnished planks ; not a rug anywhere, not a hint of beeswax, and even the drawing-room was disfigured with ugly presses. When liquid refreshment was called for — chartreuse and iced water — we were served in coarse glasses, and the iced water was brought in in a kitchen

jug. There was not even a flower in a vase, not a pretty window curtain, and the drawing-room chairs were of horsehair. Whatever occult advantages their wealth may have procured them, it cannot be said that beauty, comfort, the joy of living, were amongst them, for a more undecorated interior and duller persons I have never met, and yet, with so much comfortlessness, there was not a touch of vulgarity. The squireen was a rough son of the soil, but you accepted him as the animals of the field ; you felt he belonged to the land, and, as such, claimed indulgence. You would not elect to pass your days in his society, any more than you would care to have a bear prancing about your drawing-room, but you instinctively felt his superiority to the town fop, who thinks himself a very fine fellow, with a little tailoring and a vast amount of pretension.

The second *hobereau* dwelt in the same department, but I visited him with very different results. I was invited to lunch, and my host drove me seven miles in a pony-cart. Here, also, were an imposing park and avenue, and an immense manor, which seemed all windows. There was among the guests a magistrate from Poitiers, who was witty as only a Frenchman can be witty. Our host was a charming, bright-eyed, lean little old man, full of vivacity, of charm, and intellectual alertness. He was volu-

ble, and avid for information, and walked me up and down a delightful *berceau* to obtain my views of the woman's question and the relative positions of the young French and English girl. He even pressed me to contrast the French and English novel, and said he greatly preferred Scott to Zola—an opinion I endorsed with fervour. People drove over from neighbouring places, and we were quite a large party at lunch. The talk was capital—local, but interesting ; no cheap gossip, but plenty of genial wit, anecdote, and repartee. The women were dowdily dressed, as provincial Frenchwomen frequently are. I judged them as dense, impervious to ideas, utterly uncultivated, never, in all probability, having read anything except the thin religious literature on which the virtuous ladies of France nourish their minds ; but they could well hold their own in conversation, could cap a phrase with elegant neatness, and the hostess deserved well of her kind for the evidence she furnished of a perfectly ordered household. It would, however, be a mistake to credit them with grace because they are Frenchwomen. Nothing comes with such a shock upon the traveller in France, used to the feminine grace and charm and witchery of dress in Paris, as the dowdiness and want of ease, the total lack of taste in dress, the heavy figures and unexpressive faces of many of the women of the pro-

vinces. They dress shabbily, will even wear cotton gloves and badly cut boots when they consider themselves extremely exclusive, and carry off these defects of costume with a singular and unmistakable air of distinction. The commoner kind prefer to shine in fashions and colours unfamiliar to the eye of Paris ; and, as a rule, look clumsy and obtrusive in their fine feathers. The same applies to the men. These, when they prefer to be shabby and roughly arrayed, look far better than the pretentious gallants who, by means of obvious tailoring, offer destruction to the susceptible dames around them. There can be no doubt that an elegant male costume is out of place and a vulgar blot along a sleepy little street where men in blouses pass and bonneted girls and women wheel barrows before them.

The farmer's life has undoubtedly a larger share of natural interests than that of the *hobereau*. It is more purely animal, without any attachments to a world unconnected with the land. Ask a farmer what he thinks of politics, and he will tell you that he has nothing on earth to do with idiots or tricksters. He who must warily watch the humours of the seasons cannot trouble himself with the humours of electors and the ravings of voluble deputies. He walks his dew-washed meadows at dawn in wide-leafed felt ; and, as he surveys the produce of his labour, his long

hours of sweating travail, can he feel other than contempt of the highly remunerative and windy profession of the politician? The superiority of the lord of the soil to whom he pays tribute, he will readily acknowledge, but none other. In the west he will speak of his family as "my sons and the creatures," meaning his daughters. In the land of the Cévennes, his children are *les droles*, and the same unquestioning obedience is expected from both sexes by this rough and silent tyrant of the soil. Outside his farm he has little esteem to waste upon his fellows; within, is far from prodigal of tenderness to his women-folk. These he expects to stand at meals in a corner of the kitchen, while he and his sons sit to eat. He governs haughtily, with few words; but in his rude heart he knows that the real, the silent, and unobtrusive government lies in the hands of his wife, who, with the tact and watchfulness of affection, corrects the errors of his harsh temper, and smooths out the asperities of home-life. It would be difficult to find a people to whom modern femininism is more repugnant than the French, and hard to name one that owes more to the intelligence, good-will, and incessant labour of women. Frenchmen object to women in the liberal professions, and make a desperate hue and cry the day a talented lady seeks leave to wear the lawyer's toque and gown. Yet the fields are tended by women;

flags are waved at railway gates by them ; in the lower ranks they bravely do all the rougher work of men, and nobody lifts a voice in protest. Woman may leave her home to make money in the humbler walks of labour, and cause no flutter in male bosoms ; but let her elect to do so in paths where ambition lures and pay is higher, and instantly a howl of dismay runs through the ranks of her oppressors and slaves. And yet, if common sense and logic were general instead of rare virtues, even in France, it would be understood that the abandonment of the homes by peasant women is of much more serious consequence to a nation than the infrequent flight into legal and medical circles. The woman lawyer will always be the exception, and if she makes a good thing of her venture nobody is a penny the worse. But examine the home where the wife and mother spends her day in a factory, in the field, whose occupation requires no talent or ambition, and their physical and moral effects are of a very different nature from those that follow the winning of diplomas. The woman works as hard and as long as her husband, and is paid less. They return home to a cold hearth, an uncooked dinner. The man, never an angel where his stomach is concerned, swears and threatens, then sulks and goes off to the wine-shop. There is no compensation for the missing comfort in the few miserable francs

earned. No women are more admirably adapted for making the home happy than Frenchwomen. Their general competence is matched only by their industry ; and it is a pity to see these fine domestic qualities wasted on outdoor work. Of course, in the case of widows nothing can be said. When the bread-winner is taken away, the woman must perforce shut the house door, and go abroad in quest of the right to live. Girls are in their proper sphere, too, in working manfully on their father's farm until their marriage, and fatherless girls, without that most useful of national institutions, the *dot*, must needs find bread wherever they can. But the outside labour of the wife and mother can never be too deeply deplored, above all in the case of the best of wives or mothers, such as Frenchwomen, taking them as an average, usually are.

Connected with rural and provincial life are some quaint and pretty religious ceremonies. I need not refer to the *Fête-Dieu*, familiar to all travellers in Catholic countries. The sight of this well-known procession will please or repel you according as it appeals to your head or your imagination. But a far more picturesque procession, and one containing an element of poetry not at all discoverable in the *Fête-Dieu*, is the blessing of the fields and orchards between dawn and sunrise. What a novel and peaceful treat I used to find this ceremony in my far-off

French schooldays, whereas the Corpus Christi procession was but a scorching misery ! To rise in the blue crepuscular light, with the early birds just stirring in their nests and heard behind the unshuttered windows, and emerge from the deep convent porch into the dew-washed country, following and followed by all the town, walking in two long lines, widely apart, behind the priests in their stoles and surplices, and chanting solemn Latin hymns ! It was a rich Norman land we wandered along, now by glittering rills, with the smell of violets in the air, by narrow green paths through the newly ploughed earth, while the mounting sun cast joy into our faces, warming the chill spring wind, and provoking the birds to rival our hymns with their clearer and sweeter notes ; then through continents of apple bloom, whole lakes above of pink-white blossoms on either side, with rivulets of upper blue seen through the tracery of foamy waves. Who, watching that solemn procession of amiable enthusiasts, chanting hymns to God and beseeching Him with confidence and fervour to bless the earth and all its produce,—wheat, wine, fruit, and flower, the water we drink, and the grass we tread upon,—could smile or carp at the sprinkling of the ground, of trees, of river-bed with holy water ? There was something deeply impressive in the hymns sung at that early hour, while the towns still slept and the



BLESSING THE WHEAT

J. A. Breton

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woods were scarce awake. As a superstition it seemed to carry us back to the great primal superstitions that have run through the earlier religions. It remains ever upon memory as a large and noble and beautiful form of belief, where Pagan and Christian of all time meet in their fear of inclement nature. Religion has ever associated itself with the rural dread of disaster. Priests say masses for sick cattle, and if the cattle do not benefit by this harmless custom, the peasants are thereby greatly comforted; they have the satisfaction of knowing, at any rate, that should the cattle so prayed for die, it was in the design of Providence, against which even the prayer of devout man was inefficacious. If religion never made more injurious concessions than these to ignorance, the wildest freethinker that ever unsheathed a sword against it must be shamed into laughter at his bellicose attitude. Indeed, it is not only the Catholics of France who expect their ministers to stand between them and rural misfortunes by prayer and holy water; in the Protestant Cévennes a pastor of the Reformed Church has been known to exorcise a field of evil spirits, or tackle by prayers the devils in a poor beast, and even in an entire herd of cattle; and the peasants dread even more than the devil a mysterious god called the *Aversier*.¹ An apologist for these peculiar

¹ The maker of rains.

customs maintains that since Christianity cannot prevent superstition it is wise in directing it, —sending it thus into a right and beneficial channel. This is surely debatable ground. Superstition is by no means the appanage of ignorance only, and we must be grateful when we find it inoffensive and poetical.

In Paris to-day, you will meet educated Frenchwomen who are convinced that St. Anthony of Padua went to heaven and was canonised in the exclusive interest of their lost property. A friend of mine, witty, cultivated, a wide reader and traveller, accompanying me on a walk, dropped one of her gloves just outside the avenue door. She perceived her loss when we had gone a few paces ahead. “Oh, dear good St. Anthony,” she exclaimed fervently, “make me find my glove, and I will light a candle in your honour. And now I am reminded, dear St. Anthony, that I owe you already a candle for my note-book which I lost and found last week ; I will pay both on the recovery of my glove.” I listened to the prayer in stupefaction. We turned on our heel, and there at the *porte-cochère* lay her glove. She pounced upon it, and cried, “Thanks, thanks, good St. Anthony, you will have your two candles this afternoon.” Now, this was not a peasant, a servant, an ignorant little bourgeoisie. She was a woman of liberal education, a frequenter of the noble Faubourg,

the friend, guide, and philosopher of several authentic counts and countesses and marchionesses and diplomats, a woman who had travelled in Russia, Poland, Germany, and England, and admired all these races ; in fact, a charming old lady, a mass of pride and prejudice, yearning to-day for another St. Bartholomew, and yet devoted to several Protestants and to at least one freethinker ; who professes an *ancien-régime* hatred and scorn of the lower classes, and treats her servant, her portress, her *frotteur*, the woman who sells her milk, and the woman who sells her vegetables as her dearest friends, from sheer largeness of heart and generosity of nature. She is not the first person of whom I can truthfully say, "Her virtues are all her own, her vices belong to her religion."

In Brittany it is the custom to bless houses, and this ceremony is not always accomplished without some bluster ; above all, if the spirit of the dead should be attached to it. When a Breton suspects his house to be under ghostly domination, he sends for a powerful fellow in sacerdotal raiment to dislodge the devil. The priest comes, clad in surplice, and, holding his stole in hand, takes off his boots, so that he "shall be a priest to the very ground." We are told that the staircase and the floors are inevitably covered with sand as evidence of the traces of the ill-intentioned dead. The priest must follow

those sandy traces as far as the chamber where they stop. There he shuts himself up, bursts into fervent prayer, and has a hand-to-hand fight with the evil spirit. His triumph is asserted as soon as he succeeds in casting his stole over the neck of the dead, who has taken the shape of an animal, usually a black dog. The beadle and the sacristan are told off to carry away the possessed animal. They lead it to a sterile marsh, or a forsaken quarry, or a meadow hollow, and the priest cries, "Here shalt thou henceforth dwell," and lets the evil spirit go free ; saying this, he makes a wide circle, and departs.¹

Coming from a feverish centre like Paris, where, as a rule, lives are too crowded with interests, one wonders at the limited interests of rural and provincial life. Sometimes you will meet a country gentleman who dabbles in literature, writes a local guide or an historical essay on some personage or fact connected with his own particular town or village, and then you may count yourself fortunate. Depend upon his natural wit to make the place interesting to you. Such a pleasant squire once imparted a sort of glow and charm for me to Taillebourg, and that dullest of little towns, St. Jean d'Angély. He peopled the neighbourhood with great names, and the very pavements instantly grew sacred. His erudition went so far as to revive Blue Beard,

¹ " Satanism " by Jules Bois.

an ancestral neighbour, and show me the Marquis of Carabas, with his immortal feline friend, getting married in the reign of Francis I., from the castle at which I was a guest ; and though the life at that summer castle was frightfully monotonous, one forgot the monotony in romantic associations. But this is an infrequent blessing. Unless you form one of a hunting party, I know nothing that palls more quickly upon the outsider than the kind of existence led in French châteaux. There are no day or evening amusements. Ladies between meals sit under trees and talk. If they always talked brilliantly upon general topics, this would be pleasant enough, but as all roads lead to Rome, so do all topics to-day in France lead directly or indirectly to politics, and this is fatal. Literature is only a tepid discussion on the latest novel: and this does not carry one far. Then there is a solemn walk with your hostess about the grounds, or a drive outside, and in the evening after dinner a game of bezique with somebody, or the pleasure of watching somebody else play "patience," and conversation of a not too thrilling kind. Should your hostess or any other visitor be exceptional, delight and pleasure can be extracted from notable talk ; but in the case of ordinary men and women, it is very trying to meet together for the dismal satisfaction of being bored simultaneously. The proprietors naturally do not realise

this. They have the excitement of receiving guests, whose arrival must be a change in the burthen of inalterable routine. But I have never left a French château without a feeling of sincere gratitude for not possessing one. The sensation of imprisonment, of futile chains, is oppressive. Here, as elsewhere, individuality is effaced by inexorable common law. To be original is to be amusing, no doubt ; but, still more, unseemly and mad. You may be a little wild in speech, provided you walk the respectable step of your fellows without the slightest deviation. Your wit, if you happen to have any, will never be more appreciated, for on that ground the French are exquisite judges ; but if you cross your knees, or pick blackberries, or dance a hornpipe, or climb a tree, or smoke a pipe, or whistle a tune (I mix up the offences of both sexes against French propriety), you are safe to go forth with a blighted reputation. Many years ago, before I knew these things, I shocked an amiable country gentleman and his son, a correct young officer down from St. Cyr, by breaking away from them to gather and eat lovely blackberries along our path. They told me it was considered extremely improper in France. They mentioned, upon pressure, so many other things that are regarded in rural esteem as improper, that I suggested writing, with their aid, the things a man and a woman (especially a woman) cannot do

in France, but on consideration found it would make too large a volume. Here is exhibited the lasting charm of the French character. Had I said such a thing to an Englishman, imbued with a sense of his own correctness, he would have resented it as a foreign impertinence. My French host was charmed with a criticism which he understood to be meant good-naturedly, and added, "I have ever wondered at the reputation we give the English in France for excessive formality, for, personally, I have always found them to be a great deal more genial and easy than ourselves, and I readily recognise that we are much more formal." When you read French and English newspapers, and see these two great races, the greatest of the world, showing their teeth like angry dogs, you might believe both nations incapable of a just or generous word of each other. Well, I, who am neither French nor English, can testify to the magnanimous recognition of national virtues of both to each other. A feeling of rivalry, of jealousy, of bitterness, may exist on either side, but I know none who have expressed more cordial admiration of British qualities than the French, none who have returned the compliment to them so generously as the English. I still remember the words of a gallant French officer to me one evening after dinner: "It is an unfortunate misunderstanding, exploited by infamous

journalists of both countries. between two races made to sympathise with and admire each other. English and French, we complete one another, and as friends would hold the world." And how true this is ! There are faults on both sides, as there always are in a misunderstanding. The English are admirable, the French are lovable, and both have the defects of these qualities.

Even now, as I write these lines, feeling runs high in both countries, one against the other : higher and more aggressive in France, I admit, than in England, and yet I should fill a volume were I to attempt to repeat the splendid and noble things I have lately heard said of England in France, the proofs of regret for this lamentable and, I trust, fugitive state of affairs which I have received from various sources, beginning with cultured men of letters and science, then from Catholic women of the world, who see no reason to hate England because their newspapers tell them to do so; and lastly from workmen, women of the people, from my washerwoman, who once wisely said to me, "If we listen to the newspapers, French or English, we shall all become as stupid and degraded as the Boxers of China."

What one first remarks about the French peasantry is the clean and comfortable aspect they present : tidy blue blouses, sabots, strong shoes, neatly patched trousers, and their air of

natural breeding. Among the mountains they are of rougher build and manners ; but in the plains of Berry, in the flat, green department of the Loiret, where the landscape looks like a little bit of Holland on the edge of the still and sedgy Loire where it ceases to be navigable, the very labourers more resemble well-to-do and well-bred farmers than the class to which they belong. Their breeding and neatness, if you come upon them in the wild solitude of the fields, are in keeping with the gracious silence of shepherd life, instead of being a blot upon it, and their civilised speech does not jar upon the banks of grey, flowing water, or among the warm, sunlit meadows.

Farther south-west the manners are less commendable. Mistrust of the foreigner is more visible ; and if you ask your way, you risk falling upon the practical joker, who deliberately sends you wrong out of gaiety of heart. Landscape is decided by region, and local character is decided by religion. Volubility and Catholicism seem to go hand in hand ; rigidity and sternness with Protestantism. La Rochelle and Rochefort are Protestant towns on the coast ; the Cévennes territory is Protestant, also the towns of Nîmes and Montpellier in Provence. Speaking broadly, I should say the French Protestants are more intelligent, the Catholics brighter ; the Protestants deeper in brains and

sentiments, the Catholics more winningly vivacious. You esteem the Protestants, you like the Catholics ; and your sympathy for each will be prompted by temperament, intellect, and instinct. Catholics will always regard Du Chayla, the Christian persecutor of the Cévennes, as a martyr ; Protestants, more justly, will pronounce him a hateful persecutor. Religious persecutors, the world over, find their fervent apologists, and it may be said that a large proportion of the French race approve to-day of their St. Bartholomew, and yearn for a repetition of it ; just as the good Catholics of the Spanish race find little to condemn in the horrors of the Inquisition. If there should break out a second Revolution in France (we have been living so long on the brink of it that I am constantly reminded of the story of the boy and the wolf, and ask myself in dismay, How long have we to run before meeting with the famous moral of the story ?), be sure this time that religion will prove the provocation. I cannot predict on which side it will burst, but assuredly the red flag will be "anti-Semitism." In the provinces this sentiment runs in a feebler, less aggressive channel, and the rural atmosphere seems to cleanse the air of it entirely. Here religious feeling is either stagnant because of the absence of religious rivalry, or it is a dull assertion of hostility in abeyance, only waiting for the occasion to break out in a tor-

rential downpour. In provincial circles known as clerical, bicycling is regarded as improper, because it has been pronounced unfashionable. At Orleans you will see women and young girls punting as you wander out beyond the suburbs towards the source of the Loiret, in the charming demesne of the Polignacs, but you will not encounter a woman on a bicycle, for Orleans is a clerical town, and, consequently, all that is most fashionable and pretentious. France is aware of the ills which clericalism has brought upon Spain ; yet, for the moment, she is deliberately walking backward, through the strenuous efforts of the snobs and of a defunct aristocracy. These reactionary influences are the work of a coterie of intriguing women and ambitious priests in Paris, and now even material and private interests are menaced by conspiring malcontents.





CHAPTER II

PARIS AND PARISIANISM

THE exaggerated Parisianism of the foreigners who settle in Paris is one of the things the French of to-day profess to resent ; it is one of the reasons of the great Nationalist cry, "France for the French !" as the Chinese yell more murderously, "China for the Chinese !" Such a feeling of resentment ignores the tribute paid by these foreigners to the indescribable charm and fascination of Paris. For it is not the affairs of France that the foreigners meddle with, but exclusively those of Paris. The provinces are much like other provinces, and you might live therein a half-century and fail to find out that there was anything particularly catching in French politics,—anything absorbing in the questions of the hour. I have known foreigners established for years in Florence, in Venice, in Rome, who have never once opened an Italian newspaper; who take not the slightest interest in anything that concerns Italy beyond that which picturesque Italian peasants and noble

stones may inspire. Not so with this bewitching and exacting Paris. Everything here combines to force your powers of resistance ; and while you are musing in the Louvre or the Musée de Cluny, behold, the roar of revolution is heard without, and down the solemn halls must you hurry into the blithe air,—forgetful of past, of dreams, of historic associations, of sentimental reveries in front of Leonardo's "Gioconda," to learn the latest whim of a petulant city, to learn the latest black deed of whichever party you have come to detest as a personal enemy.

Elsewhere will you meet architectural effects more beautiful,—quaint old streets a thousand times more captivating, reaches of river more lovely and more strange,—but nowhere else will you find modern life unrolling in an atmosphere of such beguilement, set in a frame of such large and harmonious beauty. Nowhere else will you find the very poorest in a measure to be envied, since even they, with a little good will and an eye to look about and enjoy, may make something cheerful of their lives by reason of their environment. The perspective of starvation is not an agreeable one anywhere on earth, but surely a dry crust may be not altogether ungratefully munched walking along the quays of Paris, with those broad sweeps of lines and hues of enchantment upon either horizon ; and something not unlike a step of delight may be danced

along the joyous, noisy "Boul' Mich'" with an empty pocket, even if one be the victim of the remorseless term-day, or have no prospect but the shelter of the doss-house at night. For there is no squalor in Paris, no griminess, and penury itself is decent, discreet, admirably self-respecting; and even drunkenness, though of a far more perilous character, if we are to believe the newspaper reports, than in London, abstains from the revolting outrages against sight and hearing we are accustomed to in the cities of the British Isles. To be poor in London is to be the poorest of poor devils upon the globe, for there life offers you no compensation. You live in such a slum as the Parisian eye has never gazed upon; the faces around you are sour or bloated, according to temperament and habits. There is no lightness of air, no brilliance of perspective, to distract the eye from the inward contemplation of daily misery, unless you put on your hat and trudge endless miles to get a glimpse of the long, bright boulevard of Piccadilly, or the sophisticated wonders of the Strand. The attractions of these I willingly admit, and own the Strand, on a wet, lamp-lit winter's evening, to be a beautiful, strange vision of grandeur and diversity. But then how far these all are from the slums, and the way in London is long, and if your pocket is empty, how are you to get on the top of an omnibus to enjoy a change of view?

But in Paris, should your pocket be empty and your room sordid, you need only saunter into the clear, vivacious air to find yourself within walking distance of every charming point of the radiant city. Between her broad and winding river, Paris lies, a two-volumed tale of romance ; on every leaf, as you turn it, matters for musing and rapture, life around you full to overflowing,—the life that has been lived still vivid to remembrance, not clothed in sadness, but in the gracious gaiety of tradition. The scenes of dead hours are animated with floating suggestions. In the Marais, with all these neat, alert workwomen, well hosed, hair alluringly dressed, contented with their lot, which is laborious and frugal, so long as they can brighten it with laughter and the customary joys of beautiful objects which abound here on all sides,—who is to weep for the days of old, and the great historic dames who made its ancient glory ? You remember the great ladies of yore, and you are thankful for the sight of the sympathetic workwomen of to-day, and greet them with a tributary smile. For it is the women of Paris who create the better part of its living charm, whether in the populous quarters, where they toss their morning greetings to each other, or to their swains, along the freshly awakened faubourgs and clean streets, with their shining runlets of water which you must dexterously jump,

by broad boulevard and acacia 'avenues ; or, later in the day, in the regions of luxury and millions, where the sirens of fashion, arrayed with a taste Solomon never dreamed of at the time sacred tradition supposes him to have envied the lily of the field, corollas emerging from exquisite sheaths, with the plumage of paradise upon their frivolous heads, pass and repass on their mission of smiling destruction, of ruthless rivalry, of scented glory. As well dream of a city of London without its trousered armies, rushing on the wings of time in pursuit of gold, as try to imagine a Paris with woman dethroned. She holds all the strong places ; she vivifies the town from the old Place of the Bastille to the heights of Montmartre, where the texture and trimming of her garments is the topic of the hour ; and men gather on the boulevards at the hour of absinthe, in devout expectation of seeing her pass by. Whether they discuss politics or art, be certain she is at the bottom of all their talk. The talk is assuredly not of the most respectful kind, nor is the attitude of Parisians to her such as we could with accuracy describe as clean or chivalrous, but they give to her what she, light-minded as she is, demands,—their full attention, a consideration of her charms, her dress, her vagaries, her virtues, her vices,—an attention that never wanders, the most generous measure of contempt, admiration, eternal grati-

tude, and eternal faithlessness that the pervers-est witch ever clamoured for. Such is her power that I am tempted to believe that if her ideal were a high, instead of a low, one, she might invent a type of Parisian very different from the well-known *boulevardier* and hero of French romance. But alas ! this is her failing. She has no other ideal than that of ruling by the senses, and mastering the worst in man by the worst in herself. The ideal in her is wrecked on the alluring rock of her own making,—dress, for which she lives, and without which Paris would not be the Paris we know ; and, being frail and human and sadly silly, as the best of us are,—Heaven be praised !—we admire even when we would fain deplore.

The finest impression the life of London leaves on memory is that of the wealthy quarters. The pageant of Rotten Row is unforgettable. The splendid roll of life and movement along Piccadilly, the bright impressiveness of Park Lane, of those squares of lofty town palaces, give such a notion of privilege and purse as may be had on no other spot of the globe. But the happiest and most lasting impression of Paris lies in the poor and populous quarters. Who in memory dwells most on the magnificence of the Champs Elysées ? Who in after years, remembering Paris, cares about all the luxury of the Park Monceau, with its fashionable

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and expensive avenues? But what we do remember, with pleasure and surprise, are the agreeable aspects of labour, of every-day life, of outdoor breathing, the variety, labour, vivacity, and insistent beauty, at every turn, of public existence. It is the delights of street study which hold our imagination enthralled. In Paris we realise that the Revolution has indeed brought about something very near to human equality, since here the poorest know and love the feeling of independence, and we understand the world to be made for them and not exclusively, as in London, for the privileged few. Here aristocracy is an incident in social existence, and any attempts at insolence or haughty airs, which thrill to admiration the soul of the British burgess and small shopkeeper, would in this democratic Paris speedily bring insult on the head of the offender. The Parisian workman will "Monsieur-le-Comte" the aristocrat to his liking, but Monsieur le Comte must mind his manners and be careful not to trespass. He took his head off once, and he hopes that will prove enough, not being more bloodthirsty than his own interests and privileges demand. Who can consistently pity a populace, however hard it may work, and however ill it may feed, that has the right of way along such well-kept thoroughfares; that has such fine statuary and elegant architecture to keep it in good humour!

Who is really poor that may refresh his eye upon the terrace of the Tuileries, across the Concorde Place, and take his airing along the boulevards, or in the lovely, old-fashioned Luxembourg Gardens? What point of Paris is dull to look at? Where are the shop-fronts that do not fascinate? Take even one of those old aristocratic streets of the noble Faubourg Varenne, or of Saint Dominique. At first glimpse it looks a long, dull harmony of stone,—a uniform grey, with high emblazoned gates and closed lodges. But note the peeps into flowery old courtyards, the charming tufts of garden foliage lifting their green branches above the high walls. Glance down the sudden break in the street, where a kind of tall walled terrace runs, trellised, rich in leafage, as silent as the street of a dead city, where wealth shelters itself from envy by its tone of subdued and sober elegance. And yet it is not more trim than are the haunts of commerce, the abodes of labour. Who would not envy the flower-women of the Quai des Fleurs, with their glorious vista of stone and waterway? The curving Seine, ribboned round its beautiful old island, grey-walled, upon the river's brink; the spire of the Sainte Chapelle, painted gold, upon a soft or brilliant sky, and the magnificent gates of the Palace of Justice, as much theirs as are the rich man's priceless possessions in his own house. The pleasure of possession alone is

lacking in their enjoyments ; but they miss its anxieties, and they have not to pay for the keeping in order of all those splendours upon which their eyes daily repose.

To talk of taste in connection with Paris seems as unnecessary to-day as to speak of coals in Newcastle. And yet it is the prevalence of taste everywhere that perpetually surprises inhabitants of less privileged places. Whatever these people do, whatever they make, whatever they wear, the result is pleasing to the eye. If the picturesque is not always achieved, be sure neatness is. Give a poor woman an old skirt or bodice, and instantly will she go home, take it to pieces, and make a new skirt or bodice out of it that will gladden the eye, once upon her. So in her modest way will she improve the general view, and freshen up a porter's lodge or little doorway. It is by the united action of all those various devices of a race of unerring taste and an indestructible sense of neatness, that Paris, in all its open corners, and byways, and thoroughfares, is, by outward manifestations, the home of permanent and unchequered grace and suavity.

It is a particularly pleasant feature of Parisian life that people of small means can live both decently and economically there. Of course, economy is the chief virtue of the race ; and though it would be difficult to name a less attractive one, because of its close alliance to

avarice and meanness, it deserves our respect because of its national significance. To it do we owe the exterior neatness of person and home, the tidiness of the poorest interior of Paris. Where else but in Paris will you find a *concierge* living with her family in one small room and a kitchen just large enough to turn in, and able to preserve that space scrupulously clean, inoffensive to sight and smell, with not so much as an article of clothing hanging about, nor a speck of dust visible, nor an ornament or chair disturbed? I have not penetrated into the ragpicker's City of the Sun, about which Maxime du Camp wrote so eloquently in the *Revue des deux Mondes* some years ago; but I have no doubt that even in that elemental nest of humanity I should find orderliness, as far as it is compatible with the ragpicker's trade, to be the general law. Does not M. de Haussonville, in his *Enfance à Paris*, assure us, after repeated visits to the doss-houses of London and Paris, that the striking difference between these fugitive shelters for the refuse of mankind in both capitals is a certain dim striving towards cleanliness and taste noticeable in the Parisian outcast, and utterly lacking in the London pariah? The impartial traveller, who knows little of France and French characteristics, will have no difficulty in believing this when he crosses the Channel, and the first thing his eye encounters

in London is the frowsy female, 'with horrid bonnet or atrocious hat and feathers askew, hateful alcoholic visage, and sordid frippery all in tatters. Need one follow the squalid and ghastly vision to its lair to guess the conditions of its dwelling, the habits of its home? There are many blessings France might fittingly borrow of England and be the better for them, but we cannot deny that England, the mightiest empire of the world, would be improved by imitation of French exterior decency. It would brush from English public life many a brazen horror. The love-making of the masses would then be relegated to the privacy of four walls, and we would not see at every turn of our path Harry and his girl with their arms round each other's waist, or giggling girls in omnibuses sitting on soldiers' knees, or sights far worse than these, that scare the virtuous and make foreigners stare.

It is a settled thing that Paris is the home of vice. French novels of the day attest this fact; so do the lyrics of the halls of pleasure, where that decadent songstress, Yvette Guilbert (admired of decadent London), offers the strangest entertainment that ever delighted mankind in search of distraction; so, above all, do the songs of the unpublished poets of Montmartre, who fondly and seriously take themselves for misprized genius in the lump, and pose as so many Verlaines. Yet nothing in Paris offends the eye of

the casual loungee through its streets as the eye is offended constantly in London. In Paris you have to look for manifestations of wickedness, and then it is known that you will find them in abundance, but they are not thrust under your nose at every street corner. You may walk the streets and boulevards at the small hours of the morning, or in the full glare of evening gas, or in the gathering gloom of midnight, when the lights are being put out, and if nobody assassinates you, you risk no evil sight or sound. There are quarters, we know from the daily papers, where vile creatures of both sexes group themselves for the peril of the passer-by, where blood is shed, and hideous language befouls the air, but these lie off the travelled highways of the city ; and if you never read a newspaper, you might live for fifty years in Paris and never suspect that such a thing as crime took place within its fortifications.

Rents in Paris are comparatively high, and space is precious ; hence the exiguity of the average home of the middle and lower classes. Spare rooms are unknown, and closets and presses must be packed with the nicest precision. But it is surprising how soon one becomes reconciled to want of room in a French flat, and in how short a time one learns to pity the London householder—above all his wife and servants—for his superfluity of chambers. Once you have

climbed up the stairs of your flat, there is no more climbing, no futile running up and down stairs. Everything is at hand. You walk from your dining-room into your salon and across a level floor into your bedroom ; and it needs no excessive labour to keep all things straight, and polished, and spotless. If you are fond of experimental cooking and light housework, you can dispense with the trouble and cost of a servant ; avail yourself of the services of a *femme de ménage*, in a land where women of the people are admirably competent and honest, and potter about your doll's-kitchen to your liking. Fuel you will find much cheaper than in London, thanks to the little charcoal furnaces in enamel fireplaces, which can be lit and extinguished at will, at a nominal expense. And so a poor lady, a teacher, or a student, can live respectably and agreeably in Paris on an income that would mean squalor and misery in London. A flat consisting of three bright rooms, a kitchen, several presses, a closet large enough to stow away endless boxes in, and serve as well as a hanging-clothes closet, plenty of water, and excellent sanitary arrangements may be had in an enviable spot, with pleasant outlook and good entrance, for six hundred francs a year (£24) ; a *femme de ménage* who will cook, market, mend, and clean up as a French woman knows how, for six sous (threepence) an hour ; and if you treat

her fairly well and secure her loyalty, she will give you devotion and friendship, as well as excellent service and amazingly intelligent speech. For here you need never be at the expense or trouble of cooking complicated dishes. These are sold at the pastry-cook's or the baker's for considerably less than they will cost you at home ; so that you can live well and keep your household bills within your means, even if meat in Paris be dear. And then, when you want amusement, should your income not permit of frequent theatre-going what need to open your purse ? You have but to open your house door, and emerge upon the public Place. On a summer afternoon or evening a ride on the top of an omnibus or tram is better entertainment than that offered by many a theatre in London. A walk through old Paris, or along the ever lovely quays, is refreshment enough for eye and fancy. Three sous will take you from the Madeleine to the Bastille ; and where is it you may not go from the Bastille for another three sous ? If the chestnuts are in bloom, on foot, or on the *impériale* of a public vehicle, in imagination you are wandering through your own avenues ; and you really have little envy for the rich in their cushioned victorias. This is why I contend that the philosopher of either sex, whose purse is light and whose tastes are frugal, can make shift with less in Paris than elsewhere ; can live and

be infinitely happier there on small means than in London. So much beauty is provided for him gratis, that he must be a churl who can spend his time in moaning and whining because his private walls are undecorated, or costly carpets do not cover his floors. Let him go to the Louvre or Cluny Museum when the fit takes him, and count himself a king without the cost and care of sovereignty. Let him sit in the Tuileries, and call them his private gardens while he feeds the sparrows ; let him loaf among the book-stalls of the Seine, and leisurely turn the pages of books he means not to buy. Where will he better such luxuries, even at his own price, if fortune stepped his way ? In London, poverty is galling because there is no escape from its meannesses and its miseries. That is why the poor in London may be pardoned for taking to drink. That seems the only door, for it would need that a poor man living in a London slum should be very drunk indeed to find beauty of any kind in his environment. But poverty in Paris may be found both amusing and instructive. I am not sure that it is not the poor, the needy, the small clerk, the overworked teacher, the shop-girl, the underfed student, who do not get the best of Paris ; feel to the fullest measure its common joys, which lie not in wait for the rich and worldly. These are in too great a hurry between their amusements and frivol-



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ities, their dress, their precarious triumphs, their fugitive passions and idle loves, the consuming cares of social ostentation and rivalry, to understand Paris, to seize the thousand-and-one delights of its streets and squares and river-bends, to realise how much enjoyment may be got out of an hour in the Luxembourg or Tuileries Gardens, of a penny run down the river to Auteuil, and from Auteuil to Suresnes. When I read a fashionable Parisian novel, where the titled heroine, doubly veiled, is invariably driving in a fiacre to a perfumed and luxurious bachelor's *entresol*, in a house with two exits ; and the hero, when he is not in an elegant "smoking" costume, is making most fatiguing love to his neighbour's wife in evening dress, I am always very sorry for these misguided creatures, and think how much better employed they would be, how much happier and high-spirited they might be, if they only went down the river in a penny boat, or watched the children play, and fed the sparrows in some dear nook of the enchanting public grounds of Paris.

Another source of pleasure are the markets of Paris. The great Halles Centrales one generally visits once, and no more, as a truly wonderful sight ; but the flower-markets of the quays, of the Madeleine, and St. Sulpice are scenes of perpetual delight. There are many markets in the different quarters of Paris, where

your servant may go in search of vegetables, fruit, eggs, and fowls for the national *pot-au-feu*. It is a small luxury, however, which I do not recommend, though widely practised by the bourgeois, who has a positive genius for the slow and ingenious saving of sous.

It is for all these reasons, and thousands more that creep into the blood and the brain beyond the range of analysis, that Paris takes such a grip of the foreigner, and becomes the birth-town of his maturity. In other towns you sojourn as a stranger or a contemplator. You live apart, either in your own world of dreams, among old stones, ruins, and faded pictures, amid the dim aisles of Gothic poems, or else you form part of a foreign coterie, and give and go to afternoon teas, living like invaders, in insolent indifference to the natives around you, except in your appreciation of them should they be courteous enough to lend themselves to your notion of the picturesque, or treat you with the consideration and kindness you naturally deem yourself entitled to expect along the highways of Europe. But Paris will have none of this patronage. If you settle there it is inevitable that you will become Parisianised. I do not say anything so flattering as that your taste in dress, if you happen to be a woman, will, of necessity, become that of your adopted sister, but there will be a chance that her eye for colour will modify your barbaric indifference to

it, and the cut of her gown and shape of her hat will insensibly beguile you into altering yours. Nor, in the case of the young gentlemen of Great Britain, would I imply that long residence in Paris will affect their excellent tailoring, or turn them into the overdressed popinjays of the boulevards. The Englishman and the Parisian woman will always remain the best-dressed of their kind wherever they may live ; and, while the Frenchman, in morals and manners, can descend to odious depths unsuspected by the blunt and open-minded Saxon, he can also, when the race shows him at his best, reveal virtues of subtler and more captivating quality. I know no form of young man more charming than a good young Frenchman, and can never understand why he figures so little in French fiction. There is nothing of the prig about him. He does not spend his days in being shocked at his neighbour ; he is under no compulsion to be narrow and dull ; he does not quote the Bible, nor does he desire, like the British virtuous youth, to mould all humanity upon his own stiff and starched effigy. His wisdom is woven with a great deal of gaiety ; and when he happens to be dull, he carries off his dulness with an imperturbable amiability. This type of Frenchman a woman will never find offensive. He can oblige her with simplicity, and courtesy and gentleness are the most distinctive features of his character.

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Foreigners in Paris seem to be very much swayed in their judgments and adoption of French politics by the mental and moral atmosphere they breathe, as well as by their own natural tendencies. The average Briton far too rarely stoops to consider the question of Republicanism, but condemns it beforehand on aristocratic principles. Mr. Bodley, who wrote a singularly pretentious work on France, frequented Bonapartist circles, and sat at the feet of the Comte de Mun, and sundry other political noblemen of the same mind; and the consequence is two tomes to prove that what France wants is another Napoleon, — the very thing that nearly ruined her. The daughter of a sister Republic carries her millions into France by marriage with some needy nobleman, who has already figured in no estimable light in the pages of contemporary history written by fashionable romancers, under the guise of fiction, and she perhaps brandishes her parasol at the head of a band of miscreants, called *La Jeunesse Royaliste*, in enthusiastic admiration of its mission to batter the hat of a guest, an old man, the Head of the State, the Representative of France before the world. Mr. Bodley's ideal appears to be not the good of France, but the triumph of the ideal of the archbishops and owners of castles. The Republic is bad form, and he would fain see it overthrown for the pleasure of his good friend, the Comte de

Mun. What the Parisianised, ennobled American subject wants is to see her admirable and chivalrous husband Court Chamberlain, or something of the sort ;—she, too, yearns for the life which every other countess in Paris wants, a Court to confer a forgotten dignity upon herself, and if she longs for the re-establishment of the old privilege, it is in order to patronise and protect those she fondly deems her inferiors. Other rich or needy foreigners in Paris wish for a Court to shine at, a monarchy or an empire, to be able to boast of their powerful relations. And what none of them will see is that France, in her several experimental moods, is seriously labouring to discover the form of government best suited to her needs, and that the elect of the people still hope, through trial and blunder, to reach the ideal of a progressive liberality. But the passion, the earnestness, of all these Parisianised foreigners in their adoption of the several prejudices and aspirations of Paris prove the truth of my assertion, that Paris absorbs us in her furnace of ardent sentiments and theories as no other place does. We can not stand by and view the spectacle of her follies and furies like a philosopher. Needs must we go down into the fray, which in reality does not concern us, and brandish the stick or parasol of revolt, whatever our nationality. Needs must we adopt a party in the land which regards us mistrustfully as foreigners, and

rewards our generous enthusiasm for its multiple causes by calling us "Sans-patrie," "Jews," and "Traitors from Frankfort," subsidised by a mythical syndicate, like the Czar, the Emperor of Germany, the King of Italy, and the Pope of Rome. Needs must we fret and fume, grow irritable and ill, perhaps long to hear the tocsin ring for another St. Bartholomew's, if we are on one side,—that of the large, unenlightened, and foolish majority; yearn to people the Devil's hole with sundry scoundrels we have come to hate if on the other side, that of the elect and liberal minority, with a passion of hatred no public men in our own country have ever inspired. What is the meaning of it? Is there some subtle magnetism in the air of Paris which makes us see French rascals as so different from other rascals, French tragedy as more poignant and intense than any other? I know I could cheerfully get through the remainder of my days in Spain or Italy without giving a thought to either government or caring a straw whether Sagasta or Crispi were in or out of office. I never see much difference between the gentlemen who in turn manage the affairs of England; in fact, I never have the ghost of an idea who is at the head of each department, and could not for the life of me distinguish between Mr. Codlin and Mr. Short. Not so in this brilliant, variable, light-headed, light-hearted, graceless, and

bewitching Paris. I am burningly anxious to know all there is to be known about each minister of war, and take their repeated defections almost as a personal grievance. I eagerly examine the interpellations and their consequences, count majorities and minorities in the turbulent Chamber, follow the fortunes of the Senate, applaud, disapprove of all that happens with the ferocity of a citizen who pays to keep the machine going. I know well that I am a fool for my pains, and that I would be far better employed in minding my own business. But it is all the fault of Paris for being so abominably, so mischievously interesting. She it is who will not let you let her alone. She is like a vain woman ; she must have all attention concentrated upon herself. She clamours for your notice, and despises you for giving it. If you stand aside with folded arms and look elsewhere, she will get into a passion, create a frightful scene to attract your attention, and when you obey her and give it in unstinted fashion, she turns on you and sneers and rails at you for a foreign spy and busybody. Poor Mr. Bodley, all ignorant of the fretful indignation he often roused in France by his thirst for information, was for long regarded by many an honest Frenchman as a spy.

Oddly enough, I hold that the pleasure side of Paris, its fashionable world, is the least of all to

be envied. If I were a millionáire, I think I should prefer London, with its larger public life, its more varied hospitalities, for the investing of my millions in the thing called experience. Even a British ass, with time on his hands, and millions to squander, can discover an original method of going to the dogs and casting his millions into the bottomless pit. But what can the French idiot do after he has sent his shirts to London to be washed, and invested in an automobile? He is such a superlative dandy and humbug—I would fain use a hideous word, which describes him still better in three letters, if it were not for its inexcusable offensiveness—that he cannot bring sincerity to bear upon his imaginary passion for sport, and looks ten times more absurd when he is playing the athlete than when he is contentedly playing the fool. He is “the sedulous ape,” not to literature, like Stevenson in his young days, but to the Anglo-Saxon; and the folly lasts on to the brink of age.

The Faubourg holds itself more aloof than ever. It is now not even on saluting terms with the Republic. Still its life must be lived after a fashion, and it must give balls, if for no other reason than the ignoring of ministers and their wives. It cannot be said that the country at large is much affected by its doings; and if we are to judge the inhabitants by the fiction of the day,—the dialogue novels of Gyp, of Lavedan, of

Abel Hermant, the psychological studies of MM. Bourget, Hervieu, Prévost,—the sane and intelligent person may thank his stars that he is still free to choose his society, and is not condemned by an accident of birth to tread such a mill of vaporous frivolity and futility, of intellectual blankness and arrogance, and of senseless corruption. I do not presume to say that these clever writers are invariably accurate in their delineation of fashionable Paris, nor do I deny that there may be a good deal of exaggeration in their sombre and revolting pictures,—for what lies under the sparkling effervescence of the brightest and wittiest of Gyp's earlier work if it is not a dead-level of inanity and perversity? But their singularity consists in the fact that all are unanimous in their conclusions, in the general tenor of the life they portray. Pride of birth is the only sort of pride this class seems to possess, and for a nod the heroines of all those heraldic pages fall into the arms of the first comer and the last alike. When you make the acquaintance of a viscount, you may be sure he has an *entresol* somewhere for varied clandestine loves, and passes his time between encounters here, *le boxe*, and his "circle." One solid, useful action never seems to be entered to his account. His days and nights are devoted to accomplished idleness and seduction, and his busiest hours are those spent on his toilet. And the women of this

dreary and monotonous fiction,—how shall we qualify them? They have all the frailty of the wicked, red-heeled, minuetting eighteenth century without any of its charm, its wit, and real intellect. For if the marquise of the old school, passed into perfumed memory, were a rake, she was not a fool, she was not a rowdy, and she had a feeling for great deeds and great thoughts. She stands on a picturesque eminence in the history of her land. We cannot say the same for the titled rake of to-day. It is the fashion to treat her as a *détraquée*, because she subsists mainly upon excitement. But what needs altering is her standard; what should be overthrown is the altar upon which she sacrifices her futile existence. Not that she is the only example of her class, but somehow the novelists have not thought fit to present us with any other. The strange thing about it is, that she and her mate in the game of battledore and shuttlecock with reputation and morality, the incorrigible viscount, have been brought up under a supervision and care exceeding northern conception. Neither was permitted a moment of licensed childhood. Priest and nun were at the side of each, in constant attendance upon their minds and manners and morals. The male cherub lost his wings when the abbé made his last bow and retired, leaving his charge alone on the brink of temptation, a youth with a budding moustache. The

maid ceased to be an angel before the honeymoon had well begun ; and, if we are to believe polite fiction, was already one of the pursued of snaring sinners before she was a week a bride.

The Paris of this class is not the Paris that charms and holds you in its spell. The fast, luxurious, and expensive Paris belongs to it ; the cosmopolitan Paris, kept going by the millions of the foreigners who come here to amuse themselves. Theirs is the Rue de la Paix, the Concours Hyppique, the Arménonville Restaurant, the Bois, the avenues of the Champs Elysées and the Parc Monceau, the race-courses, the Théâtre Français "Tuesdays," the charity bazaars, the flower feasts and exhibitions, the automobile competitions, the "five-o'clocks," and M. Brunetière's lectures on Bossuet. This is the rowdy, reactionary Paris, ever on view, which disapproves of the Pope, and would assuredly array itself in garments of gaiety if M. Loubet were assassinated. This is the Paris which sneers at *rasta-quouères*, and is ever on the lookout for American heiresses for its needy titled sons, which is rabidly anti-Semitic, and supports its prestige upon Jewish millions. Quite recently, when anti-Semitism was raging in France, and we were informed in every tone of fury and contempt that no self-respecting Catholic could possibly regard a Jew as an honest man or a French subject, an authentic French marquis

married the daughter of a Hebrew' millionaire, and to console themselves for the obligation of profiting by their noble comrade's good fortune, his friends summed up the young lady's qualities in three amusing lines :—

“ Belle comme Vénus,
Riche comme Crœsus,
Innocente comme Dreyfus.”

The raillery did not prevent “ tout Paris ” from being present at the splendid marriage ceremony, and inscribing its best names upon the wedding gifts. It could not do less, seeing that its king and master, Philip of Orleans, the *digne* (for alas ! there is no English equivalent of that indescribable French word as applied to a man) representative of the House of France, is said to have accepted a million from the bride's anti-Semitic Hebrew mother.

There is another side, less known, of aristocratic Paris. This is the quiet, exclusive, genuinely religious side, that of old-fashioned, rigid noblewomen, who live apart in their dull, old houses of the Faubourg, given up to prayer and good works. There is a charming distinction about them, a musty, conventual odour, as you enter the halls of their faded hotels. They preside over *ouvrirs*, where ladies of their like meet to make church articles and decorate altar pieces. Sometimes they carry piety and good-

will to the poor to excess, for I know of one, a baroness, who neglected her children to make perfume and soap of her own invention, which she sold for the benefit of the poor. The instinct of trade so developed that she ended by opening a shop, on which she duly bestowed a saint's name ; and here, if you are willing to pay exorbitant prices, you may find wherewithal to wash and scent yourself with the labours of aristocratic hands, and tell yourself you are doing so for the good of mankind. Not that I would laugh at those ladies, who are the salt, the redemption of their class. I once lodged in the dismantled hotel of such a countess, and was edified by the stately, chill dignity of her austere existence. Her private rooms were furnished with a touching simplicity. Even in winter there was not a carpet anywhere, no sign of luxury or comfort ; but in her private chapel, where Mass was celebrated every day, the vestments and ornaments were both beautiful and precious. She herself had nothing whatever to do with the frisky countesses of French fiction. She was in every sense of the word a great lady,—handsome, with aquiline features, and with hair worn high off a noble forehead, reserved, possibly too haughty in bearing and expression for her reputation of piety, but essentially one of the elect of this earth, the kind of woman that an aristocrat should be, and too

rarely is, to justify her privileges and pretensions.

Here, far off from the roar of reaction and the rumble of revolt, such women dwell amidst the dim splendours of an impoverished house, unfamiliar to the frequenters of routs and races; whose names never appear in the society columns of the *Figaro*; who are chiefly known to the poor and the priests of their neighbourhood; and they it is who preserve some charm for the Faubourg, who help us to regard it with some indulgence and sympathy in its futile discontent. For what can be the benefit to itself or to France of this fine attitude of disdain? Every part of a nation should go with the times, and the Faubourg would have served its own cause as well as its country's in abandoning its belated ambitions, and making the best of its existing circumstances. It feeds its pride on its absurd exclusiveness; and who is the better for this? It is largely due to this insane vanity, that Paris has become the centre of rowdy cosmopolitanism, the pleasure-ground of the entire world, for it is the titled malcontents who attract the class they are pleased, with signal ingratitude, to call, contemptuously, *rastas*, instead of looking after the affairs of their country. Since they will not earn their right to live, they must be amused, and amusement is the costliest thing in the world. Not having enough money for this pro-

fession, they needs must set themselves out for the capture of alien millions ; and then when the foreign millions fall into their laps, by way of Frankfort, or New York, or South America, they mourn and lament because the foreigners take root, Parisianised by the sorceress Paris, and cry out that France no longer belongs to the French, and that Paris is sold to a band of cosmopolitan miscreants.





CHAPTER III

SOCIAL DIVERSIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

WITH a race that has so thoroughly mastered the art of living, and not merely working or vegetating, the question of diversion is of paramount interest. In the fashionable world, sport monopolises the better part of man's hours. This is an overseas passion, adopted with frenzy and fervour. M. Rémy de Saint Maurice has given us the odyssey of the record cyclist in an amusing and humorous book, *Le Recordman*, where we see the wealthy idlers of France in awed adoration before the prowess of the racing-wheel. The champion cyclist raises storms of emotion wherever he runs, be it in Paris or in the provinces. When he returns to his native town, all the authorities come to meet him and do him honour.

The French race is essentially a conversational and not a sporting one. It has a natural predilection for the amenities of life, and we feel how inappropriate is this present craze for rude and unsocial games. You need only watch a French-

man on horseback, and contrast him with a British horseman to assure yourself of the fact that the point of view of each is quite different. The Anglo-Saxon rides ahead with the air of thinking only of his horse. The Frenchman trains his beast, like himself, to have an eye to the arts and graces, to curvet and prance minuettingly, to arch its neck as he himself bows, and he brings a suggestion of the salon among the shadows of the Bois de Boulogne. Should there be a mortuary chapel on their road to this sophisticated paradise, stand and note the pretty way these dashing creatures will salute death. Spaniards would do it, I admit, much more gracefully, for in the art of salutation the Spaniard comes first beyond a doubt. But you will not see anywhere in the British Isles so pleasing a spectacle. Some bend altogether over their steeds, hat curved outward on a wide sweep ; others pause midway, less ostentatious and theatrical in their respect, and hold their hats in a direct line from their eyebrows, admirably suggestive of diplomatic reticence, younger and elder men all expressing every shade of effective recognition of alien grief with a subtlety, a dramatic felicity of movement and line the stiff Anglo-Saxon could never hope to achieve. Of course the supercilious Englishman would say he had no mind to play the monkey, and find a cause for just pride in the rigidity of his body, and the stoniness of his

well-trained and inexpressive visage. But here I differ from him. A man loses nothing by outward grace, and there is no reason on earth why he should rejoice in the fact that he cannot bow.

The motor craze has superseded the cycle craze. The *bourgeois* bicycles so much that the youth of fashion needs something to distinguish him on the road from his inferior brother. So somebody came to his rescue with the motor-car. Go to Paris if you would realise what a perilous thing the crossing of a street may be. In such a neighbourhood as the Place Pereire it is almost mortal. I imagine it as a machine invented by the upper classes to replace the guillotine, and run down the miserable foot-passengers to avenge the beheadings of a century ago. Whenever I return home, and discover that I have lost a purse, a book, a packet according to my invariable habit, I am so thankful to feel that I am still alive, in spite of the automobile which charges through the streets in such a dreadful way, that I balance loss and gain, and count myself still a winner in the game of life by every new day to my account. In London you are everywhere enveloped in a sense of public protection. The cab drivers know how to drive, a feature of their trade they are most imperfectly aware of in Paris. The policeman is there when he is wanted, and, thanks to him, the nervous passer-by is valiant and unafraid. But in Paris

the driver regards him with an eloquent hostility. His one hope is to get a free chance of running over him. He is insolent, overbearing, and menacing, unfettered by policeman or law in his man-crushing career. And, as if regretting the very slight limits still left him, Paris cast forth upon the public way the motor-car. This machine of destruction hisses along, leaving a trail of petroleum in the air, and you have barely time to start back for its passage, such is the fury of the horror in the hands of its fashionable owner. There are many motor-cars in use for the big shops and public offices; but these, being in no sense competitive in luxury, measure the ground by a speed less fatal, the drivers seem to desire to leave you whole, and suggest by their pace and bearing, some glimmering of humanity in their heart. For it is only the rich young men who give one the notion of wishing to avenge the massacres of the French Revolution. For the benefit of these flowers of the race, exhibitions of motor-cars take place, under the patronage of dukes and counts more or less authentic. And, so encouraged, these wild Parisians set out in their automobiles for the harmless and distant provinces, and charge down the long French country roads with purpose often more deadly than that displayed in the capital. The newspapers acquaint us with frequent accidents; and whatever the general sentiment regarding

these accidents may be, I always feel that they are a well-merited chastisement. Why must the poor, the obscure, the inoffensive clerk and shop-girl, go in fear and trembling of their lives, that the privileged few may add a fresh sensation to their list of entailed emotions? Is not the luxury of a horse good enough for those busy idlers, without adding heart disease to our inherited disorders?

Boxing and fencing are also favourite exercises, as well as polo and tennis amongst games. One of the more serious of diversions is the duel, the first of which must be fought in early youth, and the last when temperament and politics shall have said their final word. Then come the amusements of club life, which absorb a good deal of masculine leisure, of course, and where men meet to talk and be entertained, as well as to eat, and read the newspapers. The races and the horse-show are sources of pleasure at which every self-respecting Parisian drinks. Not to be connected with horses or exhibitions would be almost as bad as not to possess an automobile, not to be seen in the *foyer* on great theatrical nights, not to have fought a duel. But beyond even all these pleasures are the noisy suppers of the fashionable restaurant, where everybody who is anybody meets "tout Paris"; where the dresses of the women find rivalry in the decorations of the men, and the scene

approaches the ideal paradise, the mundane city peopled with brilliant personages.

In all things the French *bourgeoise* is more difficult to divert than her aristocratic sister. She is much more particular and infinitely more restricted in her ideas upon feminine liberty. While the women of the upper class arrogate to themselves the right to amuse themselves in whatever fashion they like, with lovers or without them, bicycling, skating, shooting, on horseback, in automobile (the Duchesse d'Uzès was the first Frenchwoman to obtain a certificate as woman driver of the motor-car), private theatricals, they can smoke or scale the mountains of the moon with impunity. All these varied avenues of distraction are rigorously denied the *bourgeoise*. She is the most conventional of creatures, and anything like marked originality in one of her sex terrifies her and fills her with distrust. She was bred in the conviction that girls should resemble their great-grandmothers, be clothed until marriage in the integrity of imbecility, and after marriage in the narrowness of piety, and know no other amusements than those strictly suitable to a "feminine" woman. The path her mother and grandmother trod is the path she must never deviate from. She must be just as religious as they were, taking care, however, to follow the fashions of her own class, in order to guard

from so dangerous and disreputable a pitfall as originality, which, with her, means pronounced eccentricity. When she lives in Paris she dresses well ; but the province often transforms her into an inconceivable shape of dowdiness. In Paris, thanks to the lectures, music, drama, literature, the multiple elements of culture, it is impossible for her to escape, unless her days be entirely devoted to domestic economy and good works ; she is rarely destitute of that agreeable worldliness that makes commerce with her, however shallow and superficial she may be, facile and often instructive. And when she has the hardihood to plunge into deeper waters and think for herself, when she ceases to be beset with a craving for the ordered in conventional circles, and to think ill of originality and individual character ; there is no woman on earth more charming, more capable, of readier wit, of less intellectual prudery, wedded to a wholesome independence of judgment and principle.

But as I have said, the amusements of the *bourgeoise*, “big” or “little,” are very restricted : books, theatres, balls, dinner-parties, with the excitement of religious ceremonies, an academy reception, a noisy sitting of Parliament, the hourly expectation of revolution, a correct evening party,—the dullest thing on earth wherever it takes place. But, on the other hand, we may be sure she will find ample entertainment

in looking after her admirably managed establishment, in making her own and her husband's means go a very long way in accomplishing a thousand little domestic meannesses unknown to the thriftless Anglo-Saxon, and all with a certain geniality and discretion that win her the esteem and goodwill of her fellows. For of womankind she is the most genial and well-mannered, and though she may, in straitened circumstances, deny every pleasing luxury to her family, her good humour will keep those around her in good humour, and the counting of lumps of sugar and of grains of coffee will seem a slight matter compared with the flavour of domestic courtesy that accompanies the process. I have known of an English family where at table forced strawberries and peaches were daily eaten, and vegetables at a fabulous price, upon the finest damask and priceless china, to the accompaniment of glasses flung by sisters and brothers at an argumentative head, plates flying, and oaths showered like missiles. Who would not prefer the economical French middle-class table, where, in well-to-do families, lunch is often served on shining oilcloth or table as polished as a mirror, to save washing, and where the amenities are as carefully guarded as if the household were on view?

In this world the young men, as elsewhere, have the best of it. Theirs the licence of man-

hood in all things. The moment dinner is over they put on their evening suit and file off (*filer*, as they say themselves, in their pleasant French slang) in the quest of pleasure. If they are well-to-do they have no difficulty in getting accepted in the world of third-rate titles. Tarnished dukes will cordially shake their hands. As there is no peerage in France to control aristocratic pretensions, they may have as much as reasonable man can desire of the society of marquises and counts, provided they take these exalted personages on trust, and do not seek to examine too closely their blazons. The method of making one's self a count or a baron in Paris under the Third Republic is very simple. You may purchase a Papal title at a not exorbitant cost. In Abel Hermant's *Le Faubourg*, a porcelain manufacturer was awarded the title of count by the Pope in return for a dinner-service he sent him, which was explained on the grant as *pour service exceptionnelle*. In France and America only are Papal titles taken with gravity, and pronounced with all the sounding magnificence of hereditary names. But a simpler way still, and less costly even than the interference of Rome, is to buy a plate, and have graven on it first a name prefixed by the particle *de*. When this has been accepted without demur, and the newspapers have a dozen times announced you here, there, and everywhere as M. de —, then boldly

apply the title of your predilection, and behold you are, without more ado, a noble of France. No need of papers or permissions. You are noble by the grace of your own goodwill ; and as most of the people around you are playing the same game, there is no earthly reason why your friend should be more of a count than you are of a baron. And so you may aspire to a larger *dot* from your bride. If you are in the army, you may even look as high as your general's daughter ; and when you travel abroad or journey in the provinces, you will be made to understand what a fine thing it is to be able, thanks to your own valour and judgment, to inscribe yourself in hotel books as M. le Baron or M. le Comte. You will be served better than when you were plain Mr. So-and-So. Waiters will help you off and on with your coat with a deference hitherto not enjoyed by you in your anterior plebeian state, and the society papers will record your great doings with gusto and fervour. Who, under these circumstances, would not be a count or a marquis ? Had I known years ago of the facilities and advantages offered in France to titled adventurers, I might have had the wit and wisdom to style myself countess of this or baroness of that, the sole existing representative of an Irish King or a Norman house. Indeed, such is the predisposition of the French *bourgeois* to believe in the noble origin of his

acquaintance, that one stoutly maintained before me that O and Mac were the Irish equivalents of count ; and my remark that every second washerwoman or policeman in Ireland rejoiced in those attributes of nobility was received with frosty incredulity. A French officer's wife of the name of Mahon assured me that her husband was of noble origin, and related to Marshal MacMahon ; but that, unfortunately, the papers identifying the relationship were lost, and, in consequence, they could not call themselves MacMahon. As the good lady really believed every word she was saying, I could not in courtesy point out to her that Mahon and MacMahon are equally common names in Ireland, and, for that matter, in the British Isles, and that every MacMahon deems himself a connexion of the late marshal, though not one would have thought of claiming the relationship if Marshal MacMahon had remained in obscurity.

A substantial source of income is occasionally derived by the authentic nobles for the presentation of the other kind into the halls of social greatness, and for standing sponsors for them in exclusive clubs. Another source of income for avid noblemen lies in their shooting and hunting grounds. So much is paid for an invitation, still more for the button, which permits parvenus to hunt on equal terms with their so-called betters. The extraordinary things these nobles will

do passes the imagination. I know of a viscountess who possesses magnificent hunting land on which men from all parts are invited to hunt. The guests departing naturally tip gamekeepers and servants according to their means. Every tip, by order, under penalty of expulsion from the château, must be brought intact to the viscountess, and out of these tips are the servants paid their wages.

The life of fashion in Paris is pretty much the same as the life of fashion elsewhere. Men and women ride in the Bois in the early hours, and it must be admitted that they could not find a pleasanter spot to ride in anywhere. The landscape is charming, and if you break away from the Allée des Acacias—the Parisian Row—you may even make a feint at losing yourself under columns of tall trees, by little, moss-grown paths, where the branches meet overhead, with ever in view grassy rolls of sward and bright trellises of foliage above the broad white roads. In the early hours this trim paradise is cool and quiet; and even an Anarchist on foot will have no cause to envy his prosperous enemy on horseback, for the same delights of herb and leaf, of sky and water, are his at a cheaper rate. Indeed, there is no land on earth where a good-humoured taste of vicarious pleasures may be so freely and fully enjoyed as in France. Amiable *petits gens* sit on chairs and watch the great parade of the

Bois without a trace of envy in their looks, comment on dresses, horses, equipages, bearing, as if it were but a pageant got up for their benefit. I am not sure that this is not one of the advantages of Society—one of its objects—to minister to the kindly and generous vanity of the workers of a country. These, by their labours, maintain it, dress it, wash for it, build for it, manufacture for it, keep in order for it the public roads, give the best of their blood, brains, nerve, and force to its triumphs, and are content to see how well the result of all this gigantic travail of a race looks in the show hours of national existence. The big dressmakers are repaid when, sitting in their *loge* of inspection, they watch the effect of their several creations on Varnishing Day, at Auteuil or Longchamps. The artistic temperament is at the root of all this contentedness, of these subtle gratifications which the Philistine workman does not apprehend. The Frenchman brings this sentiment of art into all he does. The word “artist” is applied to cook, dressmaker, milliner, hair-dresser. In many ways M. Demolins has shown us that the race is inferior to the Anglo-Saxon races, but it has one essential superiority—the absence of vulgarity in the artisan and shopkeeping classes. You can hold converse with pleasure and profit with your washerwoman, who also will, in all probability, be something of an artist, with the

artist's personal point of view ; with your char-woman, your hair-dresser ; and the grocer's boy on his daily rounds, if you come in contact with him, you will find to be an intelligent and well-mannered youth. It is only when you get a little above this class that you light upon a trace of commercial vulgarity. The *commis voyageur* is something of a trial on the public road. He is not a pattern of manners, and he is apt to be aggressive in his desire to obtain the value of his money. Go still higher, among the wealthy bourgeois, and in no land of all the world will you find men who can comport themselves worse. In their attitude to women they seem to possess no standard of courtesy whatever. When a Frenchman of this class is polite to a woman, you may be in no doubt of his views in her regard, and you may be perfectly sure of her social and pecuniary value ; for he is the least chivalrous, the least kind, the least disinterested of mortals, speaking generally, though here, as elsewhere, you will find noble exceptions. I hardly know an American or English woman who has travelled or stayed any time in France who has not had occasion to note how much less courteous to women Frenchmen are than their own men. Two young English ladies, finding themselves in some dilemma with regard to trains or luggage, had occasion to call on one of the chiefs of the Gare du Nord. This gentle-

man, elegant, disdainful, and fatuously rude, received them in a luxurious office, fitted up with such splendour as to suggest some of the complications of the Parisian drama, and bore himself towards them with such intolerable insolence, that, on going out, one of the travellers, to be even with him, said : "Everything may be found in Paris, I see, except a gentleman !" This, of course, is angry exaggeration, for nobody can be more delightful than a Frenchman, when he chooses to give himself the trouble to please and to serve ; but it is as good an example as I can give of the attitude of the French functionary to the public. Put a uniform of any sort on a Frenchman, invest him in any kind of office, and he is apt to become insupportable. Rudeness he practises as part of his official dignity. It never occurs to him that he is there to assist the public. He conceives himself to be there to insult and domineer over the public.

In France, social distinctions are less insusceptible of permutation than elsewhere. Everything is possible in a land where a tanner may hobnob with a Czar, be embraced and addressed by that august personage as "friend." The nations of Europe may object to this state of things, but the nations of Europe must put up with it. Amongst these same nations France cannot be left out of the reckoning. Her capital is always felt to be the best morsel of foreign travel. It is she who

gives "tone," for I do not speak of anything so obvious as the unquestioned prestige of her fashions. A day may come when this prestige shall have passed elsewhere, but even when that day comes Paris will continue for long years to subsist upon her ancient renown. Even now there are signs of revolt against her sovereignty. For in my own town, Dublin, contempt for her fashions is openly expressed, it being alleged here that the women of Dublin dress with far greater taste than their sisters of Paris. Those who are inclined to make light of these pretensions should go to Dublin in the Horse Show week, where I am assured that the dresses of the girls and women of Dublin leave Paris nowhere. So the good people of Dublin say, for they have a fine conceit over there, and profess to hold Europe in light esteem. But in spite of this it is not improbable that Paris will continue to maintain its superiority.

Under republican rule, woman has no official position, is in all matters of state a mere cipher. And so it is not possible for the President's wife to start a fashion, or for any Minister's wife to guide the vagaries of taste. This in itself suffices to explain to us the fact that a large majority of women are anti-republican. They feel that their sex is insulted by a Government which takes no recognition of their charm and influence, presumes to govern without the assistance

of their presence, without any loophole for their unauthorised supremacy. There is no chance for a Pompadour under a Republic, and whatever other abuses may exist to-day, ladies of light morals cannot hope to attain heraldic glory and hereditary wealth by the "primrose path of dalliance" with royal Lotharios. And so social distinctions are now in France more complex and less stringent than under the *ancien régime*. Complexity lies in the variety of claims not known in former days, when the division between the classes was sharp and infrangible. In the world of toque and robe there are men who count themselves the superiors of the crusaders ; in the army there are generals of plebeian origin who think themselves the first of Frenchmen ; there are fashionable doctors and surgeons, painters, authors, politicians, men of science, and merchant princes who regard themselves almost as the equals of the crowned heads of Europe.

All these varied ranks of society meet at a general point—social pretension. Wealth is the sole degree they really acknowledge, though "good family" is their vaunted consideration. They are aware that fashion and birth are no longer synonymous terms, that the goal is quickest won by the longest purse. A duchess with a hundred a year may feast on her own prestige in the eyes of a few intimates, but the

world at large will forget her existence to run after the capitalist of yesterday's standing. With the suppression of the power of the aristocracy, its removal in a body from the governing centre, the field was left free to money and talent ; and with industry and education both may now be said to be within reach of everybody. The aristocracy groan, ineffectual and undignified, while a large majority of the nation heeds them not. It is perfectly aware of the impotence of these discontented idlers, aware that, with a few chivalrous exceptions, who must be admired for their fidelity to tradition, it is not at all the good of the country they are working for, but their own personal triumph. Who to-day is going to stop to examine the rights, the promises, of the candidates of the three mutually destructive parties working for the hour conjointly in their vindictive hatred of a Government able to get on without them ? But all know very well that should the Nationalists win and overthrow the Republic, as they desire to do, it is only then the country would be hurried into a ruinous civil war. The inoffensive President holds the balance between Legitimist, Imperialist, and Orleanist, and as soon as arms against the Republic shall be laid down by all three we may prepare to see them showing their teeth to each other. For one of the three parties must triumph, and how will the other two that have fought with it on equal

terms tolerate this obvious consequence of its success ?

While admitting that Frenchmen have brought much grace along with the continual gratification of the senses into the diversions of outdoor existence, it is questionable if they enjoy them really as the English do. We cannot easily conceive a French Minister shaking off the cares of office to refresh himself with all the gusto of a school-boy on the golf links. Taste and national character would be much more likely to lead him to seek change and distraction in that temple of fame, the *salon*. Here we may picture him talking with the consummate and exquisite ease of his race. Their sports, like their clubs, the French have borrowed from England, and, according to the point of view, have improved or disfigured these noble institutions ; but their *salon* is their own. No other race has even tried to compete with them on this famous ground, for the reason that no other race has the art of general conversation. You must have the instinct of good conversation, be yourself something of an artist in it, be able to bring an attention, a readiness of wit and intelligence and information, demanded in this national pastime. The French speak well because they know how to listen so well. With them there is no such thing as talking down the company. The deference given is duly claimed and granted, and the

first thing that strikes you in a *salon* is the complete absence among the men of that vexatious British habit of lounging. Frenchmen in their families do not lounge as Englishmen lounge in strange drawing-rooms. I once heard a Russian woman who had sojourned in both countries say, *Les Anglais n'ont pas de tenue*. And this is true. An Englishman who counts himself a gentleman will put his feet on railway cushions when women are present, he will sprawl before women in rooms, keep his hands in his trousers pockets while talking to them, nurse his foot at an afternoon call—in a word, do everything but sit on the chairs or seats of civilisation in a simple and inoffensive attitude. Not one of these things have I ever seen Frenchmen do, even in intimacy. Their correctness in a drawing-room is scrupulous. Familiarity is the very last thing they suggest, though the house you meet them at may be one they have been in the habit of visiting once a week at least for many years. Englishwomen to whom I have remarked this peculiar characteristic of their countrymen retort that the behaviour of Frenchmen in dining-rooms is as inferior, compared with that of their compatriots, as ever could be the behaviour of Englishmen, tested by the same standard, in drawing-rooms. I willingly admit the accusation, and I confess I should find both races more delightful if each borrowed the

best of the other, and so mended their ways and became perfect. I do not care on which side the lesson begins, if only Frenchmen will eat as well as Englishmen, and Englishmen will imitate the perfect "tone" of the Frenchman in a drawing-room. The niceties observed by each in its sphere are equally admirable and equally necessary if we are ever to arrive at that indefinable and still distant state called civilisation. But to hear the Anglophobe in France (or, still worse, read him), and the Gallophobe in England talk of one another, it might be believed that these two great races stood farthest off from the goal we all aspire to reach instead of being both in their several ways nearest to it.

I will be honest, and confess that the race of my predilection, France, is far the worse sinner of the two. To soothe her wounded vanity, and an imaginary hurt of honour skilfully exaggerated by the Press, she has descended to foolish misrepresentation of a neighbour with whom she had far better live on terms of amity. The Russian alliance turned her head, and for once she had not wit enough to see that she was being deliberately fooled for purposes not in the least connected with her own interests. Since that memorable date, she has gradually raised the tone of her hostility to England, till now her chief aspiration, if we are to believe the nonsensical Nationalist Press, is to avenge the

old defeats of Crécy, Poitiers, and Agincourt. We will not speak of Waterloo. That victory is associated with Germany and Russia, and her intention is, for the moment, to pass as the very good friend of both. Left to herself, France would never have unearthed these ancient hostilities of the War of a Hundred Years, for she is in the main both sane and intelligent ; but the Nationalists do not for nothing profess hostility to the Government, and they are ready for war, even if it but lead to the reversal of the ministry, and the removal of President Loubet. For they hate poor M. Loubet with ferocity ; and I have seen in the eyes of some of my Nationalist friends, devout Catholics and Conservatives, that is, rabid partisans of the lost cause of the aristocracy, a gleam of joy when one night the late roars of the newspaper boys led us to fear that the President had been murdered. *On a assassiné Emile !* they shouted, leaping to their feet, and flinging down their cards. If their lips did not simultaneously pronounce the words, “ Thank God ! ” there was not present an expression of countenance, a tone of voice, that did not eloquently utter the unchristian thanksgiving at the thought but my own. And yet these people are all excellent citizens ; possess many lovable qualities, are capable of kindness to friends, to the poor, to foreigners even. And so I am led, from intimate knowledge of the “ Boxers ” of France, to con-

clude that the "Boxers" of China may not be in themselves reprehensible creatures, but only wild and misguided "patriots." Patriotism is accounted one of the noble virtues of mankind ; and when we obey the dictates of patriotism who is to pronounce them criminal even when they prompt us to massacre all the foreigners at our gate, and torture all their partisans within those same gates ?

The pastimes of the "little people" are infinitely more interesting than those of their betters. Here is no idle waste of money on fashion and display. Every penny spent brings in compound interest in relaxation and enjoyment. For the "little people" are mighty careful of their souse. When the small shopkeeper, with his wife and limited family, go to dine at a restaurant, it is an excellent lesson in domestic economy to watch their proceedings. One good dinner will be ordered, and the waiter places this, with a second relay of plates, before the shopkeeper, who shares this dinner with his wife, and the children feed surreptitiously off the parents' plates. Thus four persons will have dined, and well, at the restaurant price of one. As foreigners are not supposed to be up to these dodges, they will find their adaptation of them difficult and discouraging. Those who prefer to picnic in the public woods on a Sunday have a better time. They fill a lunch basket according

to purse and palate, and set out on the *impériale* of the tram from the Louvre, which takes them for three sous each to the wood of Vincennes, one of the most charming of Parisian fringes. The people of Paris are more spoiled than any other, for public pleasure-grounds abound, and no one can complain that the rich have the monopoly of the best. Where will you find such an exquisite park as the dear little Parc Monceau, with its ruins, and emerald slopes cut and watered to look like carpets of plush, its alleys and gorgeous flower-beds? In London such a cultivated bit of fairy-land would be the exclusive property of the wealthy residents round this park; not so in Paris, where verdure and flowers are cared for for the public, to whom they belong. The people of Paris have won their freedom for ever, and the privileges of the wealthy are reduced to those they can pay for. Were they to attempt the appropriation of others, the Parisian workmen are quite ready to start another revolution. Their argument is that, so long as they are willing to work, they have a right to live, and living implies not only bread and meat, but a fair share of pleasures. These pleasures for them must be inexpensive, and their pleasure-grounds must be maintained at the cost of the public, which in turn is maintained at the cost of their labour. And so they are free of the Bois de Boulogne, a gem of

public woods; of Vincennes, less prepared and perfumed and rigorously trimmed, with its wilder bits of scenery along the Marne, its hillsides and quaint solitudes; of Fontainebleau, that airy heaven of the artist, on the edge of one of the cemeteries of the *ancien régime*, the grand old palace of kings which now belongs to the nation, the little town asleep on its forest marge, where of old the Court played at life in high dramatic fashion, and "minuetted" itself with grace into the grave.

The surrounding scenery of Paris is unimaginably enchanting. Luckily for themselves, and unluckily for the fastidious dreamers, the people have spoiled all this beauty with their gingerbread fairs, their rowdy diversions, their feasts and improprieties. Bougival is given over to ladies of indecorous habits and their fugitive mates, Asnières is now a place where fast men take women at war with respectability and virtue to dwell at ease, so that these pretty resorts are closed to the puritan holiday maker. If you have not lived in the neighbourhood of a French fair for the traditional three weeks of its duration, you cannot understand to what extent a nation or a city may be martyred for the pleasure of its people. The clamour of diverse sounds begins at ten A.M. and ends only at one A.M., fifteen hours later. There are the roars of the wild beasts, the tambour beating outside each

booth at intervals, the whiz and whistle of the merry-go-rounds, the frightful music of the dancing halls, each repeating without intermission the same airs and all simultaneously, so that you hear the waltz of Faust, of Mme. Angot, the jingle of the *Danse du Ventre*, and polkas and marches in a maddening mingle. Add to this the uninterrupted popping of guns, and the shouting of the booth proprietors, and you have all the elements of an inferno never imagined by Dante. To complain were idle. The people are taking their pleasures, and the people must live. So the world of fashion, when a fair comes its way as it does at Neuilly, makes the best of it with the good-humoured philosophy of France, and goes down into its midst. At the fair of Neuilly it is the *chic* thing for the elegant diners to attend in evening dress, and admire the pugilist, the lions and tigers, the merry-go-rounds, and the exhibitions of the tents.

The behaviour of the people at these public entertainments is admirable. No rowdiness, or drunkenness, or ribald conduct, for the poorest devil in France has the art of taking his pleasures decently. But as the reverse of the medal, no people could be less innocent, less clean in its choice of amusements, and so these gingerbread fairs are well provided with obscene spectacles. I need cite only one case to prove how deep lie

the roots of the national perversity of a race which reveals in all things such remarkable exterior grace and refinement. My servant, an excellent creature, well-bred, of the very highest moral character, and a delicacy of sentiment and instinct many a lady might envy, a woman a duchess might make her friend and count herself the gainer, has a child, a little lad of ten. She has brought up this boy so perfectly that if fate transformed him to-morrow into a prince, he would have nothing to learn. She has insisted in his training on an exquisite modesty, the delicacy of a girl, and a corresponding innocence. I gave this little fellow the other day half a franc to go down to the fair, then in my avenue, and told him to go and see a brown bear and a delightful young camel with which I had made friends ; but before the child reached the wild-beast booth, an elderly gentleman, going into another booth, invited him to accompany him. Now, the elderly gentleman knew where he was going, and why ; the child did not, and he trustingly went in, paid his twopence, and followed the elderly reprobate to see—what ?—a series of anatomical models in wax ; the man explained the spectacle to the child, and sent him back to his mother troubled and unhappy. François communicated all that had passed to my servant, who came to me with tears in her eyes, and we both felt it a hard thing that a boy in Paris could

not be trusted to amuse himself in a harmless way while waiting for his mother, and almost within range of her glance, without disgusting snares being laid in wait for him, with no excuse even on the score that his elders were seeking entertainment where he was not expected to be found.

Other pastimes of the people, besides fairs and picnics, are the cheap excursions down the river with inexpensive refreshments on the water-edge, the public dancing of the 14th of July, and the illuminations, carnivals, and the feast of the washerwomen with the coronation of their queen, the free afternoons at the state theatres. All these are edifying sights, for they show you how decorously and charmingly the French people can take their diversions and how good-humoured and well-mannered a French crowd can be. If you venture up to Montmartre, the hill of impropriety, you will find a different quality in the entertainment offered. You will be less convinced of the moral and mental value of the nation. A great deal of hot blue wine is consumed, and the desperadoes of misprized genius meet to shock and shake the foundations of the hill by their stupid ruffianism in verse. Ladies display their underwear, and their havoc of virtue is gauged by the length of their laundress's bill. Tenth-rate journalists, unread and unreadable authors, penniless,

whose talent consists in their indecency, inane and flatulent "masters," pose here and enjoy in their several ways the sensation of going to the dogs in a body. They drink out of skulls, and count themselves original. A waiter dressed as a devil addresses them, *Que veux tu, damné?* Satan at the counter, with hoofs, horns, and tail, welcomes them to hell, and they think they have accomplished unheard-of villainy when they get drunk. It is not unusual to hear that these amiable gentlemen live upon the profits of prostitution, while awaiting their merited recognition from a dense and ungrateful world. Sometimes, but rarely, real talent has travelled down to the Boulevards by way of Montmartre and the dull Red Mill of Folly. Maurice Donnay is a brilliant example. He dwelt awhile on his high perch of misprized genius, but he was speedily valued at his worth, and carried in triumph into a cleaner and more intelligent atmosphere. There is nothing drearier in Paris than its resorts of vice, such as the Moulin Rouge, Bullier, its "halls of brandy and song." They are quite as vulgar as elsewhere, and infinitely more disgusting.





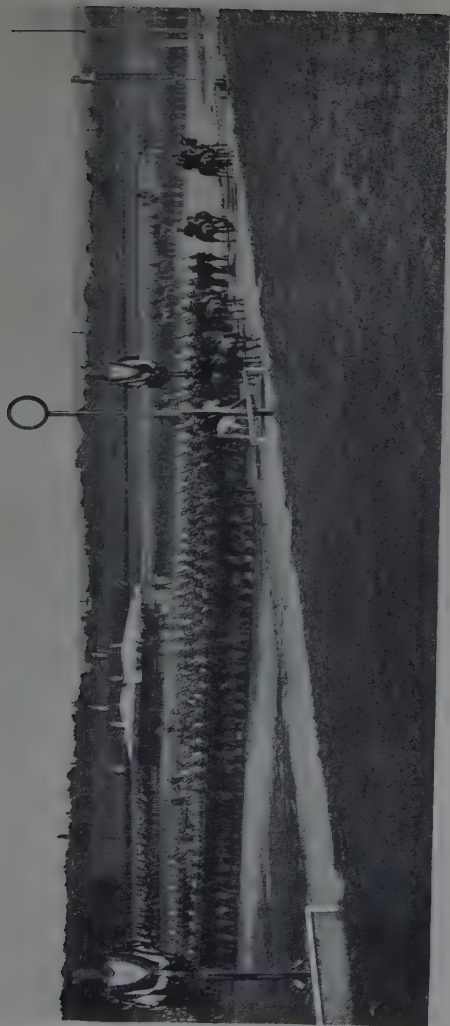
CHAPTER IV

THE ARMY AND THE NATION

THE question of the hour in France is militarism and anti-militarism. The emotions roused by this fierce duel between these two parties of the nation are poignant and absorbing, and threaten us ever with civil war. It is impossible to blink away all the perils and grievances and wrong-doing in which the final triumph of militarism could involve France ; and still less possible to deny the sad fact that a large proportion of the country are in favour of military triumph. This fact is mainly due to the infamous campaign of a Press with little instinct of honour or truth, which persuades the unthinking multitude that the salvation of France lies in the hands of a group of unscrupulous and incompetent generals who, since Sedan, have not done anything to justify the extraordinary confidence reposed in them by their credulous and easily fooled countrymen.

Thanks to Napoleon, the French are unable to bear defeat. The race is a nervous, excitable

one, susceptible to great moments of dejection, and easily plunged into terror under the influence of anxiety. They have not recovered from the effects of '70, and their souls are still stamped with the horrors of that terrible year. They wince at the memory of Sedan, and have only been able to check the depressing work of remembrance by a buoyant conviction in the near hour of vengeance. For years they have fed upon the hope of the *revanche*. Only a general can give them this desired satisfaction, they believe, and hence their absurd worship of their army, and their still more absurd readiness to fling themselves under the feet of any soldier who will fool them with tall talk, and intimidate them with the discovery of traitors. Their apprehension of treason in their own midst is one of the most significant symptoms of demoralisation. According to the modern French, every man seems to have his price, and every Frenchman is only longing for an opportunity to sell his country. Not even the Chinese have an intenser distrust of the foreigner. In the lamentable *Affaire Dreyfus*, the immense majority were honestly convinced that the nations of the world (Spain excepted) were banded together to work the ruin of France, and cast shame upon her army. They knew the figures paid to the Czar, their ally, to the Emperor of Germany, and to the King of Italy by the Jews. England as a



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rich country was supposed to be one of the paymasters of Europe in its unequal struggle against the honour of France. It was the *Affaire Dreyfus* that revealed to the amazed world the sudden passion of the French people for its army. The army saw its opportunity, seized it, and may now be said to be in revolt against the nation. Let us be in no doubt of the fact that France does not desire a military dictator, and that such a dictatorship would be the very worst calamity that could happen to her. It is easy enough to detect the wire-pullers behind a parcel of mischievous journalists ; discontented shopkeepers, whose suffrages are obtained by the promise of brisker commerce under a new condition of things ; the large middle class always in terror of socialism, which might rob them of their cherished luxuries. There are two great powers diminished under republican government—the aristocracy and the Church. These are working together to overthrow what they regard as a common enemy, and any means are welcome to them, whether foul or fair. Hence we see a marquis who has denied his order, an atheist and blasphemer who has shocked every religious and aristocratic conviction, and wounded every decent French susceptibility by pen and speech, M. Henri Rochefort, the leading light of the present agitation, a man who has heaped obloquy and contempt on French generals in

days gone by, now the honoured mouthpiece of the army, fighting, with his usual weapons, the battle of the Church and the aristocracy. Devout Catholics will say to-day of the man whose name some years ago they could not bring themselves to mention: *C'est un bien brave homme* ("Such an honest fellow!") and well-born ladies of unimpeachable morals and manners will spend their halfpennies on the *Intransigent*, in which this amiable gentleman exhales his patriotic wrath. A more singular union has never been celebrated even in France, land of incongruous contracts and odd proximities, than that between M. Henri Rochefort and the army of France, the Church, and the aristocracy.

The attitude of the army to-day may be traced to the two parties in the land already mentioned, through its commanders and officers, who naturally belong to either or both. The officers who are not well born—and they are many—would fain conceal the circumstance in a snobbish democracy, and, as a consequence, adopt with exaggerated fervour the prejudices of the class to which they desire to be admitted. For there are no partisans of aristocratic privilege so impassioned and so silly, as the middle class, who ape their ways and espouse their cause through snobbishness. It is upon the weakness of this class that the nobles of France are playing so

recklessly. Every second officer calls himself a count, or viscount, and is accepted as such with joy in provincial circles and by wealthy parvenus. I should be sorry to deny the respectability of honest religious convictions, but Catholicism at the present hour in France is too much a question of fashion and politics to inspire respect. Men who, to my knowledge, believe in nothing, make a point of ostentatiously attending religious services and simulating attitudes of advanced piety, because they think it "good form," and that it will give them tone in the eyes of their neighbours. They are well aware that they cannot hope to place Philip of Orleans on an unstable throne, being too cognisant of the fact that that singular pretender is held in light esteem even by his followers and would be far from welcome to the large majority of his intelligent compatriots, still less to the working classes, and so they pin their faith to the military dictator.

The popularity of the French army to-day, the outcome, be it said, of a well-worked political campaign, in which credulous French officers have been shamelessly used as mere tools, is hard for us to understand, if it were for nothing else but the heavy mortgage on man's freshest and most ardent years which it implies. How, one asks one's self, can independent citizens accept such a tax when combined resistance to it ought to be so easy? For, after all, in a

democracy it should be the voice of the people that rules, and not the law of a dead tyrant. Militarism to the outsider appears to be not only a demoralising force, but a monstrous expense ; and it passes imagination how so thrifty a race as the French can go on complacently squandering millions on the support of an army that has stood still for thirty years and may not move for thirty more. It would be compensation enough if one could only believe what, in the face of facts, experience teaches us to be false, that military life hardens and solidifies a man and gives him an ideal of honour higher than any he would learn in any trade or profession that might assist him to a fortune. The proof that it does not solidify the citizen may be accepted when we remember the coarsening influences of the barracks. How general is the complaint that the three years spent in the army have unfitted a country lad for farm service, a town youth for the shop ; and when you dwell on the rapid downward careers of retired officers, of men dismissed from service, of their inability, once out of regiment lines, to stand alone and cope with the difficulties of individual strife, it is impossible to agree to the theory that intelligence and force of character are acquired in the army. I once heard that *bête comme un militaire* is an accepted conclusion in diplomatic circles ; and I think the conclusion a just one. An

intelligent soldier over thirty is very rare to find, however bright and pleasant young officers may sometimes be. As for the military ideal of honour, that is hardly a thing to speak of with patience.

Recent events in France have proved how fatal it is to allow the army of a country to dabble in politics. The military code of honour is good enough for the battle-field, where all we need of men is the courage to fight well and the capacity to provoke and profit by the enemy's blunders. When the battle is won, it would be a churlish people who would ask to peer too closely into the method of winning it. For this reason a licence is permitted to soldiers that could never be tolerated in civilians. But bring those same morals into civil existence, and you may judge of the results by an impartial study of the *Affaire Dreyfus*. Where the civilian, bred to allow the individual some rights, would hesitate, the spurred and sabred hero knows no fear. He is accustomed to the effacement of the individual, to the suppression of all personal rights, to an unmitigated harshness of rule, to the dictator's unquestioned authority. The law has no terrors for him, for he possesses his own law, which is summary and implacable. All means which lead to the end he has in view are alike serviceable and honest, since he is bound to win, and, as a soldier, must make

short work of all obstacles in his path. And so, when he drifts into politics, liberty, life, honour, justice are words he recognises not. He is apt to treat his opponents as the enemy, to be circumvented at all costs, and into politics he carries the nefarious theory that all is fair in war. Unhappily, France for the tristful hour shares his belief. If militarism were not the execrable plague it is, such a lamentable state of things could never have been brought about amongst a fairly sane and intelligent people. Nowhere will you find a higher ideal of justice, of honour, of delicate and noble sentiment, than in France among the elect. This fact alone proves the French capable of every generous feeling, which we may be sure militarism will tend to destroy.

One of the worst things about the French army is, undoubtedly, conscription. Who is to measure the amount of evil done to the country by taking young men of twenty-one away from the work which is to make them independent citizens—to the commerce, the tillage, the liberal professions of a land where everything must stand still while its youth learns enough of soldiering to detest it, as a rule, without any serious profit to the army? I have gathered many impressions of barrack-life from Frenchmen and have never found that they were imbued with an excessive admiration of it. The good-humoured and indifferent make a joke of

their trials ; but it is plain to the simplest intelligence that their time, for themselves and their country, would have been better employed at home than dodging and ducking from the furies of corporals or captains. Here are some impressions culled from a young soldier's notes, sent to me by a scientific student, whose time was lamentably squandered in his year of futile service.

“Monotony is not the only thing a soldier complains of. I remember suffering many fits of indignation and of fury, principally in the beginning. A most remarkable thing about the army is that you are punished, not only for your own faults, which is quite right, but also for those of each of your comrades ; and so you are responsible for the behaviour of the whole army—six hundred thousand men. Suppose you are at Brest. You will not, of course, be hanged if a soldier at Marseilles misbehaves, but if a soldier on leave a hundred leagues off comes back tipsy and obstreperous, the leave you hoped to have will perhaps not be given, and the time you might have employed in a pleasanter manner will be spent in cleaning the floor with the bottom of a bottle, without wax. These vicarious punishments occur much oftener in your own regiment, above all, in your own company ; so that the nearer the sinner is to you the more threatening is he ; and if you have the ill-luck to

have for comrade a stupid or awkward fellow, you will be insulted and punished until that poor devil converts himself. I well remember such an idiot I suffered constantly for. The sergeant would tread on his feet when he was cold, and, consequently, more sensitive, and I have seen tears in his eyes more than once. Nobody, however, pitied him ; everyone laughed at him ; and such was his misery, his loneliness, his deep distress, that I have seen him weeping in bed like a child. He entered the army a good, poor creature, and will probably leave it a hardened blackguard. From military life, the school of patriotism, honour, and abnegation, he will only learn evil. . . . Sometimes it was so evident that our sufferings diverted our chiefs, and had no other object, that I fell into indescribable anger ; though I am not bloodthirsty, I would gladly have killed some of my superior officers—this is no exaggeration ; and I well remember one day weeping from impotent rage.”

Elsewhere he remarks that the only feeling a soldier comes to cherish is resignation. “He knows very well that none of his superiors will ever say a kind word to him, and that his destiny is to pay for every annoyance they undergo. If he behaves himself he will be compelled to toil all day without evening recreation, and his only reward will be to be called an idiot by his comrades, to be punished for them, and not be

allowed out oftener than they, and, in the case of a clever comrade, have his work forced upon him—for in the regiment the clever fellows do nothing, the fools do everything. Oh, the things I have seen ! A black-hearted sergeant, who always chose for attack weak and sickly men ; a Parisian workman, one of my comrades, on the brink of manslaughter or self-murder from persecution, not ill-natured, but destined to be sent to Africa for indiscipline or rebellion. Those who can't hold their tongues or their tempers are greatly to be pitied. I saw one strike a chief, and he was right. I sometimes scorn myself for not having done so too. It makes a great difference, of course, when you have a good captain or a good lieutenant. The beginning is the hardest time in barracks. The cavalry and artillery regiments are the worst of all. You would not believe half the dreadful things I could tell you of them. The great evil of the army comes from this. The corporal can injure you ; that is all he can do. He may punish, but he cannot reward. He can prevent you from going out, but he cannot give you leave of absence before the regulated hour. But if his power to do good is small, his power to do evil is immense. The general cannot give a leave if the corporal opposes it. In the army the punishment always suppresses the reward, but the reward never suppresses the punishment ; and as the number of those who

7

can punish is at least twenty times greater than that of those who can reward, nearly everything that happens is disagreeable. In fact, rewards are unknown. To show a curious example : leave of absence is not a reward ; the privation of it is a punishment. A soldier's paradise is outside the barracks. Offer him fifteen days of prison and after that fifteen days' furlough, and he will not hesitate. What the corporal and sergeant wish to avoid is being bored, and so, to get out of work, they punish and govern by the terror they inspire. The men do not wash their clothes because they should be washed, but from fear the sergeant should find them dirty. The idea of duty does not exist in the army ; it is the kingdom of fear, into which no ray of hope or justice penetrates."

I have left these notes of a young French soldier in their original English, with hardly an alteration. This is one of the anecdotes concerning military denseness he sends me : "In the town where my regiment was quartered there was an exhibition, and the directors of the exhibition, knowing how light a soldier's purse is (a soldier's purse is one of the most remarkable things I ever saw. It contains everything : thread, needles, pins, nails, white and black wax, buttons of six or seven sorts ; but if you wish to dig so far as to find money, you are as likely as not to reach the ground), wrote to the colonel

to say that a certain number of soldiers—sixty, I believe—could visit the exhibition free every day. In the beginning it was all right. The soldiers had as lief go to the exhibition as do exercise. They understood nothing ; they were watched by a corporal, and could not go away before the regulated hour. After two weeks there were not sixty volunteers to be found, and after a month not twenty ; after six weeks not even five. The colonel's order was that each day sixty soldiers *could* go to the exhibition, but the corporal understood *must* go, and so every day sixty unfortunates were bidden to dress themselves in their best and go and be bored for two mortal hours between pictures and ploughshares, so that in the end the visit to the exhibition was used as a punishment. This surely was not the intention of the kind-hearted director."

Something must be said of how conscription is worked in France. Military life begins at twenty-one and ends at forty-five, which means that every Frenchman is subject to the military authorities during twenty-five years, three in the *Armée Active*, ten in the *Réserve*, six in the *Territoriale*, and six in the *Réserve de la Territoriale*. A youth, when he reaches twenty-one, draws a lot in February ; he enters the barracks in November and remains there until September three years later, and is then

guaranteed as a proper defender of his country. After that, for ten years, he forms part of the *Réserve*, and twice he must return to the regiment for twenty-eight days. In the *Territoriale* he must serve once for fourteen days, and after that he is let alone unless war should break out, when he must shoulder his gun and knapsack, and go to the front with the rest. The drawing of lots takes place in the town hall, where the mayor sits with a big box filled with numbers written on bits of wood. Each youth draws out a number. Formerly this ceremony had a meaning, for the owner of a lucky number was exempt from military service, or only served a year. Now all must serve for three years, and the numbers count as nothing. Then comes the Revision Council, a most important thing. If a man passes he enters the barracks six months later ; if not, he waits a year and begins again. If he is refused once, he serves only two years ; if twice, one year ; if three times, none at all. But it is exceedingly rare that a candidate is refused three times, as it is considered disgraceful not to serve as a soldier, though you should die in barracks or always be ailing. Men are passed even in advanced stages of heart disease or consumption, too weak almost to hold a gun. The chiefs argue that military service will strengthen the weak, and be very good for the strong. My scientific corre-

spondent ironically adds : "It is, above all, very good for those who die in the middle of their three years, for, indeed, they were not hardened enough for such a difficult thing as life," But there are so many ways of escaping from the three years' servitude, the wonder is all do not profit by the opportunities offered. These are the lucky ones : the eldest son of seven brothers, the eldest son of a widow, of an invalid father, or of one blind or over seventy ; those who have a brother "under the flag," or students of all sorts. To quote my correspondent again : "There are, I believe, at least a hundred kinds of students, coming from you could never imagine where. I had a comrade who was a *clerc de contentieux*. I have never known, nor has anybody I have asked known, what on earth was a *clerc de contentieux*. He himself did not know, and when questioned about it he would answer, 'Something in the way of law.' He knew nothing more about his own profession. I am sure that he had none, but those magic words saved him two years' service."

One of the worst consequences of militarism has of late years been witnessed in France for the stupefaction and edification of Europe—the terrorising of all classes. In 1898, we saw how the army comported itself in the Palace of Justice, which it may be said to have carried by assault. The whole place was packed with officers in

uniform and in mufti, spurred and sabred menace going through the hall. The law was laughed at with amazing cynicism by these booted warriors. They refused to reply to the questions put to them, and threatened the civilians who presumed to differ from them with the horror of "a butchery." They held the field with unexampled effrontery, and the terrorised jury spoke at their bidding. You must go far back in the Middle Ages to find another such tale of wholesale assassinations, perjuries, forgeries, cynical traffic with justice, insolent manipulation of documents, suppressed correspondence, distorted telegrams, bribed evidence, strident vituperation and manifestation of despotism, the more extraordinary by the multiplicity of despots; and so delighted was the befooled populace by this parade of rabid defiance and booted revolt against national tribunals (had the magistrates been honest and the jury courageous, and both held out in the performance of their duty, the suffrages of the people would just as likely have been on their side, since the successfulness of success is proverbial) that *Vive l'armée* came to mean everything on earth, from the servant-maid's traditional love of a uniform, the street Arab's passion for the blare of a trumpet, the sentimental citizen's yearning for Alsace and Lorraine, and the longing of Imperialist, Royalist, and every other form of fractious opponent

of the Republic to overthrow the Government. In a word, it became the cry of sedition, admirably worked up by the Church, the Army, and Society. M. Urbain Gohier's famous book, *L'Armée contre la Nation*, undoubtedly contains much exaggerated abuse of French officers and French chiefs, but it also contains many indisputable truths. When one hears French officers speaking of civilians with indescribable contempt as "pekings," and remembers that all of these miserable pekings have served in the army and will be called upon, without reward or pay, to defend their country with their lives, it is difficult not to regard such a passionate attack as his as justified. The Nationalists to-day have the hardihood to describe themselves as the only true patriots, the only pure Frenchmen. The *Temps* once pertinently asked what they expected to do in war more than any other kind of Frenchman or patriot — carry two muskets instead of one? One sees MM. Coppée, Lemaître, and Barrès, the literary chiefs of the patriots, thus accoutred with an incredulous smile. After twenty-five years the patriots are still stalking the shades of Alsace and Lorraine, and hurling defiance towards the Vosges, while every honest Alsatian with them passes for a traitor.

The army owes its present unwonted prestige and popularity to the fear war breeds in the modern mind, and this fear it has evidently

utilised through its mouthpiece—the militarist Press. Every event is pressed into its service ; the return from Fashoda of a brave man, the procession of the École Polytechnique at the grand review, admired for its ill-treatment of an eminent professor, M. Georges Duruy, the son of Victor Duruy, because in the intervals of lecturing to them he presumed to write articles in the *Figaro* expressing doubts of the culpability of an unfortunate French officer, one of themselves. The sight of these young gentlemen suffices to create a delirious enthusiasm, which is fondly hoped by the authors of the frantic display will prove the death-knell of the Republic. Never has a nation worshipped stranger, more incongruous warrior-gods than France of to-day. She has embraced and wept rapturously over the military virtues and honour of an Esterhazy ; she has melted in the furnace of adoration before Major Marchand ; she has prostrated herself in reverence and gratitude at the feet of General Mercier, and now she is pantingly waiting for the generalissimo of her dreams—another Boulanger, plumed, handsome, and haughty, on a black charger. It used to be for the *revanche* she so ardently desired this deliverer, but now the hated enemy is no longer beyond the Vosges, but on the other side of the Channel. A French boy once wrote to an English comrade that he wanted to put his

hand through the sleeve (the channel, in French, *la manche*), and shake hands cordially with him. Alas ! it is her sword that bellicose France wishes to put through the sleeve, if we are to believe the Nationalists, and slay perfidious Albion.

It is, perhaps, an exaggeration to describe barracks, as M. Urbain Gohier does, as "the school of all crapulous vices : idleness, lying, debauchery, drunkenness, obscenity, and moral cowardice." But there is much truth in his contrasting statement, that "the surprising vitality and progress in every way of the Anglo-Saxon races are due to the fact that these latter escape the corrupting and degrading influence of the barracks." In war men may herd together and be the better for it, since they suffer and bear privation together. But in peace it is impossible that general life of this comfortless kind can have any but a disastrous action upon character. The twenty-eight days of the reservists may be an excellent farce, if the discomforts and trials are borne with high spirits and a sense of fun. From this point of view it is easy enough to laugh at such amusing plays as *Champignol* *Malgré Lui*, and the coarse and witty comedies of Courteline, whose military studies are steeped in a good-humoured but terrible realism. You must laugh at that brutal but brilliant little piece, *Lidoire*, capitably acted at Antoine's, even while you are filled with an unutterable sense of

sadness in contemplation of the futile suffering of barrack-life. Why should grown men, under pretext that their country may some day be attacked, be submitted to the disennobling trials of the general dormitory, to the annihilating process of inflexible and petty discipline, at the mercy of the temper and caprices of superiors? The audience at Antoine's shout with laughter when the sober fellow is brutalised for his drunken comrade, whom he is trying to shield, but the thinking spectator is saddened by the realistic travesty of justice so peculiar to-day in militarist France. One applauds the more the magnificent outburst against the army in that remarkable play of MM. Donnay and Descaves, *La Clairière*, where the tortured workman shouts, "There is no such thing as an intelligent bayonet." Think, then, what it must mean for the young fellow dragged reluctantly from his chosen work, to waste three years fretting in servitude that does his country no good, to share the common life of men more often than not repulsive to him. In the case of the poor it is far worse, for they have no means of avoiding the obligatory three years' service; and if you would have some idea of the corrupting influence of this experience on a farmer's son, read M. René Bazin's charming story, *La Terre qui Meurt*, where the young soldier back from Africa has acquired such habits of idleness, of

café loungings, of little glasses, and martial vanity that his downward career is traced out almost on the page that introduces him, and the poor fellow goes to the dogs, not from inherent viciousness, but because the barracks has spoiled him for farm-work, for steady labour.

The lucky students destined for civil professions when they leave the Polytechnique, the École Centrale, the École Forestière, have only a year's service, and that under the most comfortable circumstances. They are officers at once, with £100 a year, a servant, and lodgings in town. This cannot be said to be much of a sacrifice upon the altar of patriotism compared with that the ordinary citizen makes in shouldering his gun and heavy knapsack, in undergoing all the weary and repugnant experiences of barrack-life. As Urbain Gohier says : " Under a Democratic Republic there is only one way of escaping from the terrible barracks—the wearing of the epaulette ; there is only one means of not being a soldier—becoming an officer." You will find in France that it is precisely the people who benefit by these means of escaping the worst consequences of militarism, and women who know nothing at all about it and could never endure five minutes of the martyrdom, who are its most violent eulogists. It is difficult to explain military arrogance in France, for it certainly is not based on the fact that officers alone go to

the wars. When the battle-cry rings over the land the whole nation arms itself and goes off to fight, as well as the officers, and when the nation stays at home, so do the officers. When I asked a friend of General de Gallifet the motives of his resignation, he replied haughtily : " How could you expect Gallifet to tolerate the interference in military affairs of a miserable pekin like Waldeck-Rousseau ? " In vain did I point out that when an officer mixes himself up in politics and tries, in a mischievous and underhand fashion, to injure the Government, the Prime Minister has every right to interfere, since, in his quality of " miserable pekin," politics is his business and not a general's. And the man who was speaking to me was but a " pekin " himself, who, like the Prime Minister, had served in the army, and yet quite approved of martial contempt for all who do not wear a sabre or a plumed kepi. Watch these generals ride through the streets of Paris, beribboned and befrogged, and note the lofty, godlike way they gaze down upon the adoring multitude. Are they back from the wars ? Do all these glorious and shining medals mean battles won ? Where has Zurlinden fought with conspicuous glory ? Where Mercier ? Billot ? Gonse ? And yet they all look as proud and fatuous as the marshals of Bonaparte returning from their successful raids across Europe.

I have heard in France a great deal of fine talk,

which would be admirable and noble if it were true, about the soldier's abnegation, his lack of ambition, his disinterestedness, and modest pay. A Frenchman who had just returned from a tour through America once said to me : "It is our army which maintains our superiority ; through it we keep intact a high ideal. I was struck by this fact in America, where there is no army and consequently no ideal. There must be a generous part of the nation kept aside for disinterested work." We need only glance through the military history of the world to recognise the utter bombast and falseness of this view. Officers are no more disinterested than other men, and there are, in fact, no men so splendidly paid for their services in all lands. The general who wins a battle is a hero for ever, though no better brains, no finer qualities may go to the winning of that battle than go to the making of a useful law, the winning of an election, and less than goes to a scientific discovery or the writing of a great book. He has, as well as his pay, his prestige, his popularity ; probably a title and an estate. Jove himself could scarcely ask for more. Take, then, the ordinary officer. What does he work for if it is not for military advancement ? Is not the title of captain, of major, of colonel, of general, dearer to him far than the millions of the millionaire ? And surely our payment is measured by the price we put

upon it ! The man who prefers millions nowadays does not become a soldier, though in Napoleon's days, with the sacking of all Europe in view, it was perhaps the swiftest road to fortune. But he is paid for his services in the coin he loves best ; and what more can he require ? Why pose as the victim of his own virtues, and prate of his disinterestedness ? I was very much struck by a tragic military novel written recently by two French officers : *Au Tableau*, a tale of army deceptions and bitternesses in preferment. Here is the truth put nakedly, and here is a revelation of military want of judgment, of justice. The general is a dense brute and a snob, who chooses his officers by their rank and fortune, and not by their merit. The hero, of Irish extraction, is a man of culture, of delicate sentiment, of intensely active conscience and brains. He is sacrificed all along the line to the base intrigues of inferior men, comrades who spy and tittle-tattle, idiot aristocrats who look down on their untitled brother officers, and dazzle by their expensive hospitality. Defeated and discouraged, he leaves the army to find himself an outcast, a *déclassé*, with nothing before him but suicide. The moral of the tale, of course, is, that even in the army it is better to stay there, however hard things may go with an officer ; for outside there is nothing for him but suspicion, averted glances, ill-will, and slander. But the

picture it draws of the army from within is one of unspeakable sadness. This vaunted French school of abnegation is full of intrigues, perfidies, injustices, petty persecutions, petty miseries. It makes men glad to be outside it, breathing the air of liberty and personal responsibility.

An Englishman said to me one day, "There was only one honest man in the French army, and they turned him out." This is naturally an extravagant assertion, but it expresses in wild fashion a secret feeling in the minority. "I was bred in the worship of the army, and brought up a fervent Catholic," said an eminent French writer lately; "well, it is with difficulty now I keep myself from looking away when I see an officer or a priest." There can be no denial that soldiers with a delicate conscience are not approved of in the French army. They are regarded as dangerous subjects, apt to create "affairs." When a colonel exposed a scandalous abuse in a certain regiment, the President of the day sent him word that "a due regard for the honour of the army should prevent every officer from making an accusation, however justified, or creating any scandal that could diminish the prestige of the army." The army, we see, is the one institution insusceptible to the rigours of justice, wherein ill-doers enjoy immunity (if they are not of Jewish persuasion) for the sake of that extraordinary thing called the "honour of the army."



CHAPTER V

SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

EDUCATION in France has neither the moral nor social value it has in England. In the first place, public-school life has nothing like the importance it has with us, where a university education almost suffices to make a gentleman of a young man, for, whatever his origin may be, the Oxonian is pretty sure to plume himself on the prestige of his training. In France there is no equivalent for this rank. Where a man has been educated is of no consequence to him in after life. While he is at school, his parents, if they happen to be nobles, or snobs who desire to pass for nobles, or as belonging to a set *bien pensant*, like to be able to say that their son is at the school of Vaugirard, Madrid, La Poste, or at the Marists. This fact suffices to pose a family with the hall-mark of indisputable correctness. Neither the Jesuits nor the Marists offer such solid advantages in the way of pretension and reputation as the English universities do,

but they secure youth from the taint of Republicanism, and Society knows that it can rely on their support when the long and expected *coup d'état* comes off. In certain circles, to be educated is not the main thing, but not to be mistaken for one of the *canaille*.

M. Demolins wrote a book, *A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons*, which made a considerable stir. The author maintains that the violent contrast between the two races starts in the schoolroom, and reveals to us already the deep-seated causes of their differences. The French boy is trained in the suppression of all independence, the discouragement of all initiative. Those brought up in the secular *lycées* have nothing to remember but unqualified misery. The system is less intolerable for the day-pupils. These come at eight and leave at seven. Each class lasts two hours, and if the boy's way lies through any of the big gardens, he can enjoy, with other outdoor comrades, many an hour of play. The indoor martyrs are less privileged, for each moment of recreation is as severely guarded as the hours of class. They have stated intervals for play ; in the earlier years they are contented with running, but, by-and-by, they crave for more violent and interesting exercise, and when these are denied them, they give up play. Until lately, all violent games were forbidden in the *lycées* because they were regarded

as dangerous, and the college principals are responsible for all accidents that happen in their schools. Not long ago a *proviseur* was heavily fined because one of the students, in flinging a stone, had accidentally broken a window and hurt another boy's eye. It is easy enough, under such extraordinary circumstances, to understand the *proviseur's* persistent discouragement of rough games. Skating is not allowed, for this, too, is dangerous ; and, for the same reason, gymnastics are permitted only once a week, each student going in turn to the gymnasium and staying there for about three minutes. And so in French colleges these blustering years of boyhood know no other variety of pleasure than the treadmill of the courtyard. Backwards and forwards they walk in recreation hours, talking together ; and need it be supposed that the words of wisdom are ever on their lips ? As I have said, the day-students do not need much pity. They can make the *lycée* merely a daily accessory of life—a place they go to generally with the intention of wasting their time. Should they have the good fortune to light upon a first-rate teacher, which is rare, they will get some profit from the hours spent at the *lycée*. But the indoor student is wretched. He is a dejected being, with none of the distractions of his age—unboyish, unjoyous, watched and watching, prematurely demoralised by his fellow unfort-



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unates, and, like them, the slave of the very worst possible system of education.

M. Demolins complains that the French rely too much on stiff examinations as a test of knowledge, and a French youth writes me on this subject : " We have a great many schools in France ; as many as there are professions, since nobody who has not spent two or three years in some sort of school, and undergone innumerable examinations, can hope to do anything. For instance, I have undergone nine examinations, and it is not even over ! Naturally, I only refer to necessary examinations. They begin at the age of fifteen or sixteen. Before that period you must have been at a *lycée* or college. A *lycée* is a government establishment, and a college belongs to its township. The training is identical, but the college professors are less well paid. Their inferiority to the *lycée* professors lies in the fact that they have not undergone so many examinations as these, or, perhaps, only have come out of them less successfully. In the *lycées* and colleges there are two methods—the literary or old method, and the scientific or new one. The old method is general : literature, geography, history, German or English (never both), Latin, Greek, mathematics, every year ; in the first years only zoölogy, botany, and geology, and in the last years philosophy. But always the most important

thing is Latin. The youth who has gone through the course of philosophy has learnt Latin for seven years, Greek for five years and a half, but, knowing that his Latin will be of no service to him after he has passed his *baccalauréat*, as soon as he thinks he knows enough for that examination—and he thinks so at an early hour—he flings his Latin books at the head of his professor or recklessly goes to sleep upon them, if he be working merely for place as a bureaucrat ; and I, for one, have not the heart to blame him. Unfortunately, it is the same thing for German, and English, and everything else. Amongst a hundred young men in the philosophy class, not more than two will understand or speak German, and never more than one will speak English. Amongst a hundred French youths speaking German or English you will find that ninety-nine have spent some years in Germany or England ; the hundredth is a phenomenon. Besides, it is fashionable to-day in France not to know a word of a foreign tongue. The scientific method is less general than the literary method. It comprises chiefly sciences and modern languages—German, English, Spanish, and Italian. It is certainly more serious than the other. There is a *baccalauréat*, too, but unlike the literary *baccalauréat*, which is an aim, the scientific *baccalauréat* is only the means of arriving at an aim. The literary *baccalauréat*

leads to nothing, or to the law school, which is almost the same thing, for, speaking generally, the students have no other object than the avoidance of the three years' military service." The scientific *baccalauréat* leads to the Polytechnique school, to St. Cyr, or to the school of medicine, but those who wish to become officers or doctors do not leave the *lycée* after the *baccalauréat*, and some stay on three or four years longer. The *externes*, that is, those who go to the *lycées* only for the classes, are well off, for these find their pleasures and moral training where they should be found, at home and with comrades of their own choosing. But the *demi-pensionnaires* are nearly as unfortunate as the *internes*, as these are condemned to most of the prison tortures of one of the worst gifts the genius of Napoleon gave to the land he so basely used. "Everyone knows well enough our dreadful college," writes M. Demolins, "with its much too long classes and studies, its recreations far too short and without exercise, its prison walks, a monotonous going and coming between high, heart-breaking walls, and then every Sunday and Thursday the military promenade in rank, the exercise of aged men and not of youth."

For this reason you will never hear a French boy speak with any kindly sentiment of his school-days. Napoleon, who invented the

horrid system, was a creature absolutely destitute of kindness or humanity. He wanted more destructive machines, willing for the chance of what is euphemistically called "glory." Virile independence in boyhood was just the very last thing a man like Napoleon could be expected to value. An English schoolboy will cheerfully go to the wars by force of his own good-will, but he will not be whipped thither by Government whether he wills it or not. And you would never find him submitting, as his French brother does, with patience and resignation to a scholastic system which atrophies his body and unduly heats his brain. The instincts of his race must be considered, and these make for energy, action, and independence.

From the *lycée* to French fiction is a big jump, and at first blush neither seems to have any connection with the other, yet I do not hesitate to blame the unhealthy, enervating, and unmanly training of the former for many of the lamentable scandals of the latter. English boys are not saintly, but they are certainly admitted, by those who have had opportunities of judging both, to be cleaner-minded, with a more vigorous and healthy outlook, than French lads. The same difference exists between French and English girls. To begin with, the French are naturally less frank and truthful ; and where there is practised dissimulation it is not easy to answer for the

moral and mental cleanliness of the young. These young fellows, whose sole distraction from excessive and futile mental labour has been the daily promenade in the courtyard, who have been the recipients of insidious confidences and unhealthy talk, leave school blighted and perverted. We need not ask ourselves what, in nine cases out of ten, follows, the tenth being the admirable youth who takes himself and his future responsibilities seriously, who loves knowledge with the disinterestedness and capacity for sacrifice to it that a Frenchman of the best kind is capable of. But these others, unsoundly bred, without an outlet for the barbarous spirits of the youthful male,—what will be their experiences? Denied exercise, they cannot even fall back upon innocent flirtation with girls of their own age, for this is not possible in France. And so these newly emancipated citizens straightway wander off in search of romance into a world that it would have been wise and right to keep them out of, and whatever freshness the *grisette* may leave them can speedily be lost in the still more destructive hands of an unprincipled married woman. It is the shabby and monotonous love-affairs of this uninteresting rake, his steady degradation, that procure renown for the popular romances; to paint him and his dreary deceptions and drearier outrages on decent feeling a whole school of novelists exists

and thrives, and the great desire of the newly married bride, never before permitted to read the fiction of her own land, is to learn what life is through his unmanly and ignoble adventures. Had the boy been trained differently he would have had another ideal, and there would have been some place for noble aspirations and generous sentiment in a heart not yet hardened by squalid cynicism.

The great defect of the *lycée* system is its impersonality. The Republican professors should borrow a hint from their more successful ecclesiastical rivals, the Marists and Jesuits, and hold their pupils by the influence of personal relations, win them by the direct exercise of moral guidance. There are two courses to adopt in training youth—that followed by the priesthood, which is insidious, and which regards them not as so many young men to be taught how to live and conduct themselves as honourable men, but as so many souls to be saved in a world to come. The second is the British method, the object of which is to make men of boys, to teach them to think and act for themselves, to be self-sufficing, self-supporting, to know how a gentleman should act in all circumstances, and, should nature have denied him intelligence, to prove himself, in the depths of his stupidity, at least a "gentlemanly" ass. I give my preference, I will own, to the British system, like M. De-



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molins, but what I should prefer to it even would be a third, not yet practised, by which youth might profit by the best in the English course of training and the best in the French ; that is to say, a combination of the superior French intellectual education and the superior English moral training. If there were nothing between a well-brought-up fool and an intellectual cad, then, in Heaven's name, give us nothing but the sympathetic fool ; but how much better if we could have the well-bred "intellectual" too ! Some years ago a Greek minister, about to send his son to a public school either in France or England, did me the honour to take me for a wise and intelligent person,—which I have no pretension to be,—and asked my advice on the question of a choice of countries. I told him he would have to decide between knowledge and education. If he wished his son to be brought up in a healthy, virile fashion, taught to conduct himself on the lines of the British ideal, which for all practical purposes is about as fine a one as is to be found, though it, too, has limitations it were well to recognise and acknowledge—then let it be England, and Oxford or Cambridge. If, on the other hand, he wished to see his son a proficient scholar, well grounded in the classics, intellectually trained in the course of a couple of miserable years, his brain overworked in the depressing

atmosphere of a prison, then let the French *lycée* be his choice. The minister decided for knowledge ; and I believe his son returned to Athens a very brilliant young fellow, and all that a statesman could desire his son to be. He would have learnt less in England, but certainly he would have had a pleasanter time ; and to me it always seems that our real education only begins when we have left off compulsory learning ; that what we teach ourselves and not what others teach us is of consequence. A duffer will always be a duffer, however much you may stuff his head ; the main thing is that he should be an honest duffer. The brilliant boy will never fail to light upon food for his brains wherever he may find himself.

The misfortune is that everything in France leads to politics, and hence we have had the disgraceful sight of students in revolt against their professor, hissing and pelting him because elsewhere he had chosen to express political views to which these wise and learned young gentlemen objected, or because his politics were not those of their parents. The class of an eminent professor at Bordeaux was deserted, and stones were flung at him in the street by his pupils, for a graceful and manly reference to the cause of the death of the dean of his university, whose funeral oration he was called upon to pronounce. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to acquire

a beneficial influence as a professor, for personal prestige, the value of character—which is the highest thing we can value in a teacher—are of no account in a land where, generally speaking, a man is loved or hated, not for the life he leads, the acts he commits, the duties he leaves unfulfilled, but solely for the political side he takes. In modern France character is nothing ; politics everything. What students first demand is that their professors shall be on the side approved of by this immature class. After that they will condescend to listen to them. But the notion of being guided and influenced by the older mind, the riper judgment, does not enter their heads. The only professors who know how to grip and mark for life these malleable natures are the Jesuits. When Jesuit boys break away from their keepers, the Jesuits have no bitterer enemies. What intelligent Protestant has ever given us arguments so powerful and damning against Jesuit training as those two novels by their old pupils, *Le Scorpion* of Marcel Prévost, and *L'Empreinte* by Estaunié? *L'Empreinte* (The Stamp) is much the greater study of Jesuitism of the two. Here you see a young, pliable nature for ever caught in its meshes, not brutalised or overtly captured, but insidiously demoralised, directed unconsciously into the path of dissimulation and unsleeping watchfulness, out of which the manliest efforts he makes afterwards, when

he has shaken off its vice-like grasp of his individuality, never carry him. Here you understand, as no melodramatic stories of Sue or Dumas could make you understand, the shuddering intensity of moral hold ; the implacable, mild pursuit ; the potency and success of the Jesuits all the world over. It is a mistake to associate this self-rooted dislike of the Jesuits with bigoted Protestantism or blatant atheism. Read the exquisite stories of Ferdinand Fabre, studies by a sincere Catholic of Catholic life, which bear upon the underhand persecution of excellent, well-meaning country priests by what are called the Congregationalists, the Black Army, the Jesuits chiefly. Read that delightful study of Cévennes life under the Restoration, *Jacquou le Croquant*, by Eugene Le Roy, and see how a good French Catholic, who loves and reveres the saintly village curate, can loathe his enemies, the Jesuits. Here, too, as in Ferdinand Fabre's *Mon Oncle Celestin*, a beautiful soul, a kind of early Christian,—who lives only to do good around him, whose life is one long lesson of love, of sacrifice, and abnegation,—is hounded out of the priesthood, falsely accused, horribly slandered, and excommunicated ; and all by the secret manœuvres of the Jesuits, because he accepted the Republic, deeming it more the priest's duty to concern himself with the private interests and sorrows and trials of his flock than to dabble in

politics ; more occupied in spreading the evangelical precept, "Love one another," than in maintaining the power of the Church. I count among my friends Jesuits whom I like and appreciate, for whose private character I have the highest possible esteem, whom I have found in all respects amiable, educated gentlemen, full of gaiety and charm, and of a sympathetic address rarely to be met with in any other class of men. But of the order and its principles, based upon knowledge, I feel nothing but dislike. The Jesuits in China, in South America, have, I understand, and willingly believe, done good work. We know that they are brave, and can sacrifice their lives in the cause of their religion. I know from personal experience that they can be the most charming and sympathetic of men. But can anyone point out the good they have done in Europe ? What are their charities ? What are their good deeds ? What noble use do they make of their extraordinary worldly influence ? For, wherever they establish themselves, it is the world of fashion, and not the poor, they gather round them. When they open schools, it is for the rich, for the powerful, for the aristocrats of the land. If you pass their doors, it is carriages you will see there ; well-dressed ladies and men of fashion you will find on their steps, and not the outcast, the abandoned wife and children, miserable, poor, and withered humanity. The

order is essentially a political and not a Christian order, established to work upon the wealthy, and to obtain their suffrages.

In proof of this statement I need only quote a common phrase among middle-class Catholics, "If you are not rich or clever, never go near the Jesuits." They appreciate brains as much as money, for they can make good use of both, but you will never hear their praises sung by the poor, the "little" class, useful neither socially nor politically, through whom they cannot hope to advance their order and secure its prestige. The order was founded by an aristocrat and a soldier. Aristocratic it has ever since remained in its sympathies ; and the moral of the Dreyfus affair has given us a good notion of the military principles of honour, justice, and truth which modern France owes to its training. For assuredly it is the Jesuits who have exercised a wider influence upon the educational forces of France than any other society ; it is they who are the deadliest enemy of the Republic ; and as they hold all the forts of tradition, aristocratic, fashionable, and military, France may be said to be in their hands. It is to be hoped that when posterity comes to judge the recent crisis through which France has passed it will not spare a society which deserves ill at the hands of humanity.

One of the things for which the Jesuits are to be praised or blamed, according as you may

view the proceeding, is the extraordinary way they follow their pupil out into the world and through the various phases of his career. If he forsakes them, as the harassed hero of *L'Empreinte* does, an invisible hand arrests his course at every step. He is the victim of the implacable pursuit of those who trained him, while he can never throw off the habit of dissimulation acquired in his impressionable youth. Let him go where he will, let him be what he will, the moral of M. Estaunié's masterly study is that he is stamped with the imperishable stamp of Jesuitism. He cannot be frank and straightforward, even with a violent effort, and he knows that, whatever he does, he is being watched and followed. *L'Empreinte* is a book that should be given to every newly married pair, in the hope of making them think twice when their son is born, before deciding to have him brought up by the Jesuits. Since France is, on the whole, a Catholic country, it would be unfair to the large majority of the race to attempt to suppress the seminaries, and prevent French boys from being trained by priests. If the professors are laymen, with a tolerably free hand, there is no reason why the principals should not be ecclesiastics. A good priest can do no harm anywhere, if only he will abstain from politics and sedition. Indeed, if he thought a little more of rigid truthfulness, and recognised the value of sports in a

boy's training, I should be disposed to regard him as an excellent college principal, for we may be sure that his influence will be directed against vice of every kind. Unfortunately, the ecclesiastical temperament tends to undue interference and espionage, for which the habits of the confessional are mainly responsible. In these novels by Jesuit pupils in revolt, the abuses of the confessional in the training of boys are clearly indicated, and though these abuses are considerably diminished in the case of secular priests, I still have no faith in the discretion of the good Fathers of Stanislas.

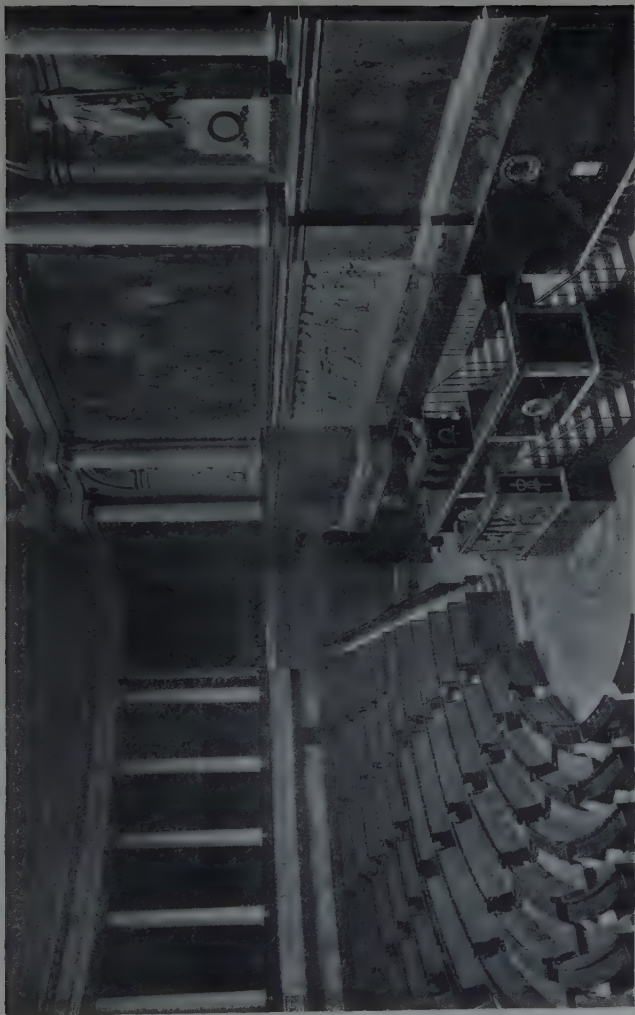
When I was present at the distribution of prizes at the Sorbonne, a very imposing spectacle, the display of Stanislas was that of a charming, well-bred group of French lads, but behind each I saw the spectre of dissimulation, the insidious suggestion of the "priestly Father," and the glory of the Church to the detriment of the State, the significant, inalterable law of Catholicity, that the triumph of good is the justification of evil, and that the law of Christ is less important than the maintenance of sacerdotal prestige and power. I looked attentively at those boys, and asked myself what the value of such training could be for them. For the priests who have educated them, they represent so many prized instruments against the Republic, and possibly so many future souls in paradise. But they

themselves? When the present fashionable craze for mere "exterior" Catholicity—which is nothing more than an exasperated revolt against foreign influences, on a level, in the record of modern civilisation, with the outbreak of the Boxers of China—shall have exhausted itself, many of the lads will be mediocre freethinkers; the greater part will be what are euphemistically called "non-practical Catholics," that is, men who are not expected to go to Mass of a Sunday in the shooting season, because it interferes with their sport; who regard confession as a distraction for women; who allow neither God nor the devil to stand between them and the most shameless vices, but who are married and buried by the ritual of Holy Mother, the Church, and whose friends, after their death, piously contemplate them aloft, wreathed and winged, playing harps and chanting hymns, who in life never listened with pleasure to any but ribald songs and unedifying verse.

I have read attentively a little *mémoire* of the Stanislas College, relating all that is to be told about its routine and order. A sadder pamphlet in connection with boyhood could not be found anywhere. Not a moment's liberty, not an hour of honest gaiety; under the eye of the overseer from their up-rising to their down-lying. It is bad enough to think of girls so trained in convents; but as the world expects less initiative,

less independence, from women, it matters less for them, though it matters much more than parents believe. But who can expect such an unhealthy system as that of Stanislas to turn out straightforward, manly youths? I will translate some of the laws of the institution, and the reader may judge for himself. If it makes him wish to have been brought up at Stanislas, under the care of the good Marists (priests devoted to the service of Mary), I can only say that I do not envy his taste. To begin with, the system of emulation I regard as disastrous; it invariably opens the door to cheating and lying, to jealousy and ill-will. Pride, sense of duty, affection for their masters, are much higher incentives to study than marks, which imply too much espionage on the part of the masters. Stanislas teaches by the desire of reward and the fear of punishment. Even in the case of very young children I hold that this system is deplorable; in that of youths, who are fencing, riding, studying philosophy and the higher mathematics, I can only qualify it as idiotic. Why should a boy receive a prize for behaving himself decently? The moment you put a premium on good conduct you invite the hypocritical to perfect themselves in the art of duplicity in order to compete for it. What master can honestly pronounce on a boy's character, and swear that the good boy is quite as good as he looks? The

THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES



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moment you tell him that to appear good is to merit a prize, his goodness ceases to be disinterested, and, therefore, virtuous ; and in order not to lose his own prize, won by the assiduous suppression of impulse, of temperamental revelation, of all natural instinct, is he not apt to fall into the approved vice of assisting in the discovery of the faults of his rivals ? The only prizes we can accept without moral danger are those awarded for actual work done. These have their pitfalls for character too, but there is not nearly such peril of demoralisation. The conduct and work of pupils are appreciated every week by the number of marks, and rewards and punishments are allotted accordingly. A hundred marks buys an outing. Is not this atrocious ? That bad conduct should keep a boy indoors when he might be out with his parents is a recognised form of punishment for ill-behaviour ; but that he should have to purchase by marks the right to go out seems to me altogether wrong. Even a boy should have his rights, his heritage of free birth ; and to be forced to pay for these upon the judgment of others is an iniquity. Forty-one long pages are devoted to the explanation of this futile, shabby, and spying system of emulation, a kind of artificial moral respiration, in which all apertures for simplicity, frankness, and spontaneity are hermetically sealed.

Here, now, are the rules of the establishment. Silence is compulsory, except at recreation hours, and then speech is strictly controlled by the president, for, says the pamphlet, "One of the first conditions of the college order is silence ; those who are unable to keep silence are running the risk of utter ignorance and worthlessness." One of the attributes of piety, also enjoined, is found to be "friendship for those who are worthy of it." I should like the Marists to explain to me what they mean by such an extraordinary assertion. In the first place, who is to pronounce on the kind of person worthy of friendship, least of all a schoolboy ? Is the pious boy himself worthy of inspiring the sentiment ? Many a pious person is incapable of feeling friendship for anybody. This does not take from his piety. It merely proves that he is charming, or cordial, or good-natured, which many an impious soul may be. And why seek to turn a pleasing young animal into a hateful little prig, asking himself, when he should be playing games and flattening an enemy's nose, if the boy he projects bestowing his friendship on is worthy or not of it ? Let the other boy be a black, a brute, or a beggar, his comrade should be content if he likes him. Friendship can never have a more solid, human, and wholesome basis. When we read this sentence we feel that the little Stanislas prig, with his eyes turned down,

and his toes turned out, wants a good kicking. If only one could hope to see his nose bleed ! but alas ! these are the laws of the recreation ground : “ All violent and dangerous games are forbidden, likewise all games that touch upon gambling, and cries, and songs, and whistling, and, in general, all that resembles disorder of any kind. It is forbidden to fling stones, to communicate with pupils of another division, to lie on the ground, to drag one another about, to fight. And the pupils can never leave the recreation-ground without leave.”

If, after that, the reader does not agree with me that it is a fine thing to be a British lad, with his cricket, his football, his occasional black eyes, his surreptitious feeding, his long-drawn accounts with the lemonade and ginger-wine merchant, his chatter, and escapades, I can only advise that misguided individual to send his son with all haste to Stanislas, and let him be turned out in its approved fashion, a first-rate, consummate prig and humbug, a well-mannered, French-speaking young hypocrite, perfected in the art of duplicity and self-repression, who, on the order of the Marist Fathers, only bestows his friendship on those worthy of it—individuals, it is to be hoped, of his own self-conscious, sanctimonious way of thinking. He has been bred to calculate the value of every action and every word, for each leads to punishment or

reward. He has never, for five mortal minutes, been permitted to show himself for the young barbarian he is. He is a pious old diplomat, a rascal in *posse*, a sage in *esse*, when he ought to be a simple, high-spirited, or dreaming child. Between his spiritual readings, his meditations, his confessions, church services, retreats, and rigid discipline, whose control of every minute only ceases when the poor martyr enters the lovely land of dreams,—where the Marists, if they could, would follow him, to see that imagination played no tricks on their training, and that in that world of vagaries and topsyturvyism he was still the pious, silent, and obedient lad they had formed,—he is not a form of boyhood it is pleasant to contemplate. He is allowed fifteen minutes to dress of a morning, under watch, to see “that he dresses promptly and decently beside his bed,” and out of that there is not much time for ablutions. Possibly, like the kings of France, his washing consists of ten fingers dipped into a basin no larger than a milk-bowl. In class he must make no movement of foot or desk, his mind must not wander, he may not open any other book but the class-book in use, he must not draw, or give himself up to any frivolous occupation—presumably verse-making. If he has need to open his desk, he must only lift the lid half-way, and never lock it, as the prefect visits it once a week. He washes his feet once a week

and his body once a month, and in summer bathes twice a week. In the parlour he can be visited only by his parents, or persons duly authorised by his parents, and when he goes home of a Sunday he must be escorted from the college and back by a "person of confidence," furnished with a signed and dated letter. This person can under no circumstances be accepted if a young man.

Those who have the responsibility of the Stanislas pupil on his outing must observe the precautions exacted by the directors. On going out he receives an entrance ticket, which his parents or guardian must fill up with the details of his day, and this account is verified and stamped on his return to the college. The pupil who returns without an escort is punished for a month. Should he obtain leave on false pretences, he is expelled. He can advance by a day or prolong for a day his winter and Easter vacations, by payment of three thousand marks. His letters to his parents or guardian are not read, but they must bear the signature of these on the envelope to assure their privacy ; all the rest of his correspondence is under strict control, and the introduction of a book, not a class one, a pamphlet, or a newspaper, constitutes an infraction of the rules so grave as to merit expulsion. This system of education begins at childhood, when he enters the eleventh class and graduates

into the preparatory classes for the Naval School and St. Cyr, when his moustache is beginning to bud and he is still supposed to bestow his friendship on those who are worthy of it. Poor youth ! He has learnt everything—from the Catechism to mathematics, from philosophy (of a kind) to fencing, riding, and gymnastics (also of a kind, and warranted never to last longer than half an hour, twice a week)—except simple manliness, independence, and the real philosophy, which will help to carry him decently through the surprises and snares of existence, and help him to meet unaided an emergency. Toss him roughly from his Stanislas bark upon the turbulent sea of experience, and what may you expect from this fatuous, trained young hypocrite ? The wave rolls over him, carries him to the bottom, and he comes up all covered with mud. Of course he abuses freedom, a stimulant he has never known, and he speedily converts it into the intoxicant of licence.

It will be seen that the training of boys, whether in French seminaries or in French *lycées*, is not the most perfect of its kind. There is the careful home-training, too, which is, of course, the best. But here also the shadow of the Church towers over childhood. The boy leaves his nurse's hands to toddle into those of his ecclesiastical tutor, Monsieur l'Abbé. He attends *cours* and studies at home, with the priest,

and when he attends the classes of a *lycée* he is duly escorted back and forth, with all imaginable precautions to prevent from getting in his mind what should not be there ; and finally he is sent to St. Cyr or Saumur, with the usual results. Gyp has given us an amusing sketch of the innocent little lad of this period in *Le Petit Bob*, about as black a little rascal as ever breathed, and of the model Jesuit boy, "Monsieur Fred," an accomplished rake, when he is not supposed to look above the rim of his prayer-book.

And now let us glance at the training of the girls. This is, if possible, more deplorable than that of the boys. But it is an admirable testimony to the natural superiority of the Frenchwoman's character that even the long-persistent effort to spoil her in early years does not prevent her from turning her liberty, when it comes, to excellent account. The little French girl in her mother's home is happier, I believe, than any other little girl of the world. No child has such tender, such watchful, such devoted, parents as she. She is enveloped in love and care from her cradle, and her privilege is to hear delightful speech about her. A foreign *gouvernante* will be engaged to teach her whatever language it is intended she shall speak fluently—German or English. If she is not to go to a convent (and this will be, in her interest, the only intelligent

decision) she attends *cours* like her brother, and the *gouvernante* is superseded by the certificated governess. A good governess, that is, a cultured and liberal-minded lady, is a priceless blessing, but, unhappily, she is rare. I do not know why the best class of women avoid the mission of training the young, for, in the case of a woman without children of her own to train, it ought to be regarded as an exceptionally noble undertaking. It is not, however; and more's the pity. Society is to blame, with its inane traditions, and, along with it, the senseless passion for inflicting slight and pain upon those in an inferior position which besets so many women in their own homes. And so, not wishing to be treated as servants, without any proper status or dignity, the superior women, who would make the best governesses, seek more independent and congenial occupation; and the training of girls at home falls into the hands of hopeless mediocrities, who have little knowledge and less manners, whose point of view is squalid and shabby and personal. I have listened to the complaints of many an unhappy governess, and I will own I have always been shocked and sickened by the silly way these women allow their lives to be poisoned by considerations they should have the dignity to ignore. How are young women to acquire a noble influence over their pupils when they are busy lamenting the fact

that biscuits at lunch were not offered to them, or other such material and vulgar slights which they usually dwell upon as unendurable? If they have heart enough to love, and brains enough to teach and guide, their pupils, and sufficient independence of character not to let themselves be trampled upon, overworked, or snubbed, of what would they have to complain? Let them raise the tone of their position, and they will get all the respect they need and have a right to. I know Frenchwomen who are grandmothers, who still love and admire the feeble and disabled governesses of their girlhood who have helped to train their children and their grandchildren. But in France the superior woman, who might have made an excellent governess, is apt to enter one of the teaching orders, where, instead of doing the good she was intended to do singly, she helps in the crowd to work evil.

The home education of girls will be referred to in another chapter; here I wish to treat of the other kind,—the conventual training. Speaking from extensive knowledge of it, and of wide personal experience, I do not hesitate to qualify it as the very worst possible. It is bad everywhere, but nowhere is it so bad as in France. Its essential object is the destruction of independence and candour. I do not say that a frank girl will never be met with in a convent, but you will never find her among the privileged ones; she

will be one of the black sheep, one of the unpliant, one of those who cannot be utilised to full advantage for the greater glory of God, A. M. D. G. ! There never was a more subtle legend invented by man for the pursuit of his own aims under the mantle of self-abnegation.

The convent girl is the creature of her environment. You will know her by the hallmark of her manners. These will be perfect when she comes out of The Assumption, or any other Parisian convent of fashionable renown. Wealthy converted Jews, of rabid anti-Semitic tendencies, send their daughters to these famous establishments for the knotting of useful social ties. I have known of the children of a great foreign merchant being accepted in one of these centres of aristocratic exclusiveness, on the condition that they concealed the fact that they belonged to the commercial classes, and the result was that the unfortunate children, with the natural ease of their imaginative years, drifted into glorious bragging and lying. There was no objection on the part of their trainers to any exercise of imagination that served to ennoble them; the objection would have been provoked by betrayal of the truth. It will be said that this is an exceptional example perhaps. Not so. The last thing recognised by nuns is the virtue of poverty, the value of the lowly born. This fact is so widely recognised by women who visit

convents that they themselves will not conceal from you the importance nuns attach to dress, and their indifference to shabbily attired visitors. I still vividly remember a rebuke addressed to a girl in an Irish convent who had got into a scrape with a companion of inferior social rank. "I am surprised at your choice of companion," said the nun loftily. "Remember, should you and she encounter outside these walls, you will be in your carriage and she will be on foot, and she may count herself honoured if you are permitted to salute her." There is no reason why there should not be vulgar-minded women within convent walls as well as within the walls of pomp and fashion, for, alas ! vulgarity and snobbishness abound ; but it is significant that nuns, of whatever nationality you find them, have a strong predilection for the wealthy and well-born. So, it will be said, have the large majority of people, regarding these as the elect of the earth. Well, if so, let girls, when they come to be women, find this out for themselves. But as children and girls, let not their freedom, their spontaneity, be hampered by such unlovely distinctions. Teach them to love all that is good and pleasant in humanity, and let the daughter of a marchioness at school make friends with the daughter of a grocer, without condescension on one side, or undue humility or concealment on the other. Why should not a school seek

rather to be a republic, based upon the lovable and republican principles of Christ's Christianity? The children of both classes will be the gainers, and each will leave school with a hearty esteem for the other. Relations can terminate here, for there is no reason why school girls should continue to be friends if their parents see any cause for objection to the intimacy ; but there is every reason that they should learn to appreciate the good there is to be found in those of a different social rank from theirs — inferior or superior. This is the very last thing they may hope to learn in a fashionable convent, since there are no greater worshippers at the shrine of birth and fortune than nuns. I am aware that the difficulties in the way of maintaining such a free mingling of the classes would assuredly come from the parents. The nobles would be horrified if assurance were withheld of perfect social exclusiveness for their offspring, and still more angry would be the sham nobles, the purse-proud snobs, whose selection of a convent for their daughters depends solely upon its fashionable reputation. It may also be contended that the society of the better classes unfits a girl of the commercial class for her after surroundings. But this fact also is based upon false prejudice. Lift the girl's moral tone, and she will find something else in the acquirement of good manners than contempt of her equals.

My next and still greater charge against conventual education is the elimination by strict supervision of all sentiment of honour. In France two girls are forbidden to talk in the recreation-ground. When they are seen to do so, instead of being separated in an open fashion, a third is secretly ordered to go and join them in a friendly way, and then return and report the subject of their talk to the nun in charge. Needless to say, only the girls regarded as trustworthy and virtuous are told off for this diplomatic duty. I myself, being a hopelessly black sheep, and, in consequence, excellent material for the exercise of this peculiar form of virtue, was long enough its victim before I grasped the fact, and could not understand how reverend mothers and such exalted personages came to be familiar with all my whispered revolutionary chatter. It would be wonderful if girls so trained should in after life scruple to read letters, to steam them if necessary, to listen at doors, and to betray confidences of every kind. And girls who know no other form of distraction and play than the dull walking up and down the recreation-ground, the nightly trial of round games, where you sit in a large circle on benches, with a string and a button attached to it, which one girl passes to the other through her closed fist, all singing French *rondes*, such as *J'ai perdu le cor de ma clarionette*, or

Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre, or the glories of Cadet Roussel? And this, remember, for girls of sixteen and seventeen — craving intelligent and exciting pastimes!

How fervently I used to bless the headache or cold that permitted me to slip up to bed after supper, and escape from the evening recreation into the more peopled and interesting solitude of my own thoughts. Things may be better since my day. Tennis, bathing, golf, cricket, and racing may now be admitted as feminine pastimes in those holy establishments where I spent so many miserable and profitless years. I hear that even baths are introduced, and that it is no longer deemed by French nuns an offence against modesty to wash oneself. But I recall a very different state of affairs — a state so curious that my French friends do not like to credit it when I assure them of it. I was fourteen when I was sent to school in France to acquire the tongue of courts and diplomacy. On the first morning that I awoke in the long, white-curtained dormitory, I proceeded to wash and dress myself as I had been taught to wash and dress in English convents. I had deposited my dressing-gown on my bed, and was splashing my neck with water, when, to my astonishment, a nun approached me noiselessly, lifted my dressing-gown from the bed, and holding her shocked glance averted murmured, *La*

pudeur, mon enfant, la pudeur, as she covered my dripping neck in the folds of my dressing-gown. When I clamoured for an explanation, I was told it was not considered decent in France for a young girl to wash her neck. We were worse off than the young gentlemen of Stanislas, whose feet are washed once a week; ours were washed only once a fortnight, and then a cloth was kept over them, lest the sight of our naked feet in the water should lead to the loss of our souls. For the years I was there, nobody, to my knowledge, ever had a bath of any kind. However, this is all changed, I am happy to say. French nuns have had to move with the times and accept the modern institution of baths.

I hope they have also grown to accept the institution of men. When I was at school we were strictly forbidden to lift our eyes to a man's face. When the old doctor of eighty passed through the courtyard, if any of us happened to be about there was an instant cry of alarm, *Baissez les yeux, mesdemoiselles. Il y a du monde. Du monde* always meant the wolf in trousers and coat, and we were invited ever to tremble, blush, and lower our eyes in the dreadful creature's presence. It was a garrison town, and whenever we walked abroad and found officers upon our path nuns would skurry down our black-robed ranks, crying in terrified undertones, *Baissez les yeux, mesdemoiselles.*

Messieurs les officiers vous regardent. Will any one explain to me the mental and moral value of such training? Is it not shocking that innocent girls should be bred in the notion that there is any reason why they should not look men frankly and simply in the face?





CHAPTER VI

NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

AMONG the national institutions of France, the place of honour must undoubtedly be given to the Académie Française ; not because of its utility, still less for the amount of respect and admiration it deserves. My own opinion is, that a more fantastic and ridiculous institution was never invented ; and to-day it has no connexion between our democratic times and the monstrous period in which it was founded. Why forty respectable gentlemen who happen to have written books more or less good (and by no means always such as to justify their election), composed tolerable operas, written amusing or instructive plays, as the case may be, should not have been content with the applause and pence of their fellows, but must needs array themselves in an absurd uniform, with triumphant green palm-leaves embroidered over a modern coat, and a toy sword at their side, and play at immortality, is what I have never been able to understand. As if the votes of his

contemporaries can possibly decide, the question of a man's immortality !

Read over the lists of academicians since Richelieu's time, and see how many among all those names you will ever have heard of. Intrigue and prejudice frequently settle the question of a day's immortality. But in the case of a century's fame it requires solid merit of a higher order than that which is often necessary to secure the election of a candidate to an arm-chair among the favoured Forty. Flaubert and Maupassant assuredly hold very different places in French literature from those occupied by the mild André Theuriet and the dull Paul Bourget ; and it is as difficult to explain the absence of Balzac from this literary club half a century ago as it is to explain the presence there to-day of M. Henri Lavedan. The mystified foreigner notes that Balzac created the colossal *Comédie Humaine*, and that M. Lavedan wrote *Le Vieux Marcheur*, and is apt to tell himself gleefully that the judgment of the elect in France is no wiser, no more judicious, than that of the common herd elsewhere. But of course the institution, with its pretentious traditions, its mock air of the *ancien régime*, is only a club, whose members choose their society upon other than intellectual grounds. There is a great deal of wire-pulling, too, in the matter, chiefly done by women. In fact, when the noble dames of



THE FRENCH ACADEMY

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the Faubourg decide to run a candidate, he is pretty certain to be elected. Loti was run by those ladies, and the first thing he did was to scare the club by breaking with all its traditions and making a mockery of academic urbanity. Lavedan, as a reactionary candidate, was naturally the protected of clericals, aristocrats, and the flower of snobbery, and committed a still greater breach of academic etiquette than Loti, by a veiled and sneering attack upon the dead he was deputed to belaud.

I was present at this extraordinary *séance*, and, although the Marquis Costa de Beauregard is an academician whom posterity may in all safety be reckoned on to ignore, it was impossible to withhold cordial recognition of the justice and good taste of his sharp retort to the inexcusable offender. Meilhac, whose empty chair M. Lavedan was elected to fill, may or may not have been as black as his appointed eulogist painted him, but the Academy was not the place to attack his character, and the occasion chosen by M. Lavedan was as indelicate as if he had selected a man's open grave, with mourning relatives and friends around, for disrespectful usage of his name. Stupefied, as was everyone else by this singular proceeding, I questioned a friend whose privilege it is to wear the palm-embroidered coat and mother-of-pearl sword, and was told that this was M. Lavedan's way of avenging

the disapproval of the Academy of his *Vieux Marcheur*, played only after his election. These nervous elderly gentlemen, unacquainted with the literature of their new colleague, were desperately alarmed when they were made aware of the nature of this popular and shocking play. The sensations of the hen affrighted on the edge of a pool where her duckling is disporting were nothing to theirs ; and so the author, at bay, took his revenge by endeavouring, with more talent than taste, to prove to them that, if they did not relish the *Vieux Marcheur* (something in the style of "sad old rake") out of their doors, they could be extremely indulgent to the same type of gentleman within those sacred precincts. At a more recent election, that of M. Paul Hervieu, M. Brunetière, reversing the order of contumely, was nothing loath to poke blame at the newly received Immortal because of his social cynicism and the unkind pictures M. Hervieu has drawn of the world of men and women M. Brunetière delights to honour. But we need not penetrate beneath the surface to explain such an inhospitable fashion of receiving a candidate into this classical club. M. Brunetière, the discoverer of Bossuet, is a fervent reactionary. The Church, the Army, Society,—behold his gods!—with the result that, in the deadly conflict waged for two years round an unfortunate Jew, M. Brunetière went with the unjust major-

ity, while M. Hervieu, the author of that dramatic and brilliant thesis on Feminism, *La Loi de l'Homme*, went with the just and liberal minority. It needed nothing more to give him over as a meal to the omnivorous editor of the *Revue des deux Mondes*, whose virtuous indignation against M. Hervieu's generous cry for justice to women knew no bounds.

In the present divided state of France, with anti-Semitism raging and disaffection rife in all quarters, even a pacific academical reception approaches the verbal war waged in the arena of politics conducted with leisure and urbanity. The ceremonial is imposing and of a supreme dulness. If you have a centre seat, the wise thing to do is to go early and amuse yourself by watching the arrivals; or manage to arrive at the last moment, and you will have the best seat of all, in the very middle of the hall, literally at the feet of the Immortals. If you know all Paris, you will enjoy yourself, for you will see and be seen of all Paris, and the dresses are usually worth looking at. After that you have the mild excitement of watching the Immortals enter, to your surprise not in academical raiment, but in ordinary coats, wearing the air of ordinary men. Only the godfathers of the newly elected, the perpetual secretary, the chancellor, always the latest member, and the gentleman deputed to receive the new Immortal wear the sword and palm-em-

broidered coat. There are no arm-chairs, but wooden benches ill adapted to the ease of age. The classical hall is about as squalid and uncomfortable a vestibule of posterity as one could wish to see, and is so ill-ventilated that, when it is full, as it always is, to excess, the spectators are frequently threatened with apoplexy or syncope. Whenever I get away sound and alive from beneath the celebrated cupola, I always feel that I have escaped unharmed from actual peril.

Then the newly elected stands at a reading-desk and reads out the eulogy of his predecessor, which a committee has already been convened to consider, and when he terminates his "discourse," his godfathers warmly shake his hand, and he sits down. The academician who receives him in the name of the august assembly replies, and reads his discourse sitting, placed between the chancellor and secretary, at the centre table, on a high dais. When the speakers read their discourses as M. Brunetière reads his, it is a pleasure, whether you agree with them or not; but this is rare, for M. Brunetière was meant by nature to be a preacher or an actor. His elocution is magnificent, his voice arresting; whereas the average man is hard to follow and, in winter, is apt to have a cold in his head. After the ceremony, greetings during the exit, which is slow and precarious, and in the big courtyard proclaim you a fashionable

person, and reveal to you the utter vanity of the whole affair. Then you understand why it is that women are supposed to be the pillars of the institution. There is something essentially wrong about fashionable women. They must, perforce, worship false gods. When they admire a writer, or a musician, or a dramatist, they are not happy until they see him in a false position. They must make a fool of him before they can consent to worship him. He administers to their vanity, and they administer to his. And so they go in a body to crown him ; and not to be present at the crowning is a confession of social inferiority. Being more intelligent than the same class of women elsewhere, their folly takes this form of rendering interesting men ridiculous. If I thought them capable of humour and irony (which they are not), I might regard this as the supreme vengeance of their sex, excluded by national prejudice from all public honours. But, alas ! no. They are in deadly earnest, and take their great men with rapture and gravity. They, at any rate, and the Immortals themselves, really believe in the Academy. They swallow each other, and piously give thanks for the meal. The fashionable woman hastens to invite the new Immortal to dinner for the exquisite satisfaction of giving him the place of honour and conferring distinction upon herself.

“However,” as Sainte-Beuve says, “we may jeer at the French Academy, but it has not ceased to be popular in Europe.” Foreigners and Parisians are equally eager for tickets, and French genius more eager than either for the prizes and renown it confers. It is one of the monarchical institutions restored by the Convention after its suppression in the Terror. Only, instead of the monarchical Institute it had been, it became a national Institute, existing by grace of the State and the people, and not by that of a minister like Richelieu, or a monarch like Louis XIV. It was thus composed of a hundred and forty-four members in Paris, and an equal number in the provinces, with power to associate twenty-four learned men with its corps. It was divided into three parts : Physical and Mathematical Sciences, Moral and Political Sciences, and Literature and the Fine Arts. This new national Institute was opened on the 4th of April, 1796, when Daunou pronounced the inaugural address. In those days there was no such thing as a perpetual secretary. The excellent republican spirit of the State was naturally modified under the Consulate, and completely demoralised under the Empire. Napoleon reinstituted the perpetual secretary of the *ancien régime*, suppressed the class of Political and Moral Sciences, — the least to be expected of a political dictator without any notion of morality, — and divided

the two other classes into three, and thus restored the ancient Academy of Sciences, French Academy, Academy of Inscriptions and Letters, the Academies of Painting and Sculpture. Hence grew the ambition to connect, in unbroken continuity, the defunct institution of a vanished monarchy and the new institution of the Directory. In 1803, it began the reactionary period, and posed as Royalist in sentiments and opinions. Sainte-Beuve defines the Academy as that of the reigning perpetual secretary.

What the Academy really remains is the home of tradition. Here the main thing is not intellect, but distinction ; not genius, but the consummate perfection of expression. Urbanity is its hall-mark, and what it most dreads in originality is the abuse of novelty. You may have little to say ; only see that your way of saying it cannot be bettered. It has been blamed for excluding from its ranks so much real genius ; and this blame would, of course, be earned by it if its object were so much the recognition of genius as the welcome to its midst of a congenial spirit. Gautier, with his long hair and red waistcoat, was not a congenial spirit, though if finish of style, charm, urbanity, and exquisite grace are accounted academical graces, there never was a writer to whom the term "born academician" was more applicable. But the

Academy always sees that there is a bulldog on the threshold to show his teeth to the "masters" of to-morrow ; a pedagogue to teach the aspirants to academical honours how they should write and think, and what small beer their literary pretensions are regarded by the Forty Immortals he speaks for so arrogantly. The bulldog of the hour is M. Brunetière. This un-amiable pedant, the enemy of individualism and youth, the enemy of all things not hall-marked with his pontifical approval, has announced that Zola can enter the Academy only across his dead body. He has many hatreds to balance the immensity of his single love and admiration, the Eagle of Meaux, but none that can compare with his implacable hostility to Zola. And yet this academical pontiff, who disapproved of Daudet, wiped out the Naturalists, shot bilious blame at M. Jules Lemaître (that was before this amiable individual sought ridicule in the famous Ligue de la Patrie Française, a sentiment he, MM. Coppée, and Barrès were the first Frenchmen of their time to discover) and at Anatole France, whose shoe-strings he is not fit to tie, allows M. Henri Lavedan to sit beside him, and does not repudiate *Le Vieux Marcheur*.

While all France has been divided of late, it would be demanding a superhuman effort of urbanity and harmony from the Immortals to expect a concord of sweet sounds to be heard

beneath the famed cupola. Politics have introduced their consequent animosity and bitterness here as elsewhere, and the academicians, like the rest of their compatriots, are ranged in two defiant and hostile camps. I am bound to say that the *élite* is with the splendid and disinterested minority. It is sad to witness the extraordinary capers, the passion for popularity in which an intelligent man like M. Lemaître indulges, and to see him brandishing a wild pen and shouting in every tone of anger ; so little dignity and common sense are left a Frenchman when hate and rancour hold him and when race-fury rolls over the land like a tidal wave, *Vive l'armée !* This famous critic has betaken himself to a sort of politics invented for the hour—a feverish antagonism to foreigners and all foreign influences, and a passion for every form of sabred hero. He goes from the Clotilde to Notre Dame, from Notre Dame to the Madeleine, in the glorious attitude and humour of the Irishman at Donnybrook Fair, seeking for somebody in the crowd who will tread upon the tail of his coat. This offence may be committed by cheering the Republic or its President ; then there is instant competition in pugilism. And so M. Lemaître, accompanied and admirably assisted by his no less heroic and patriotic fellow academician, M. Coppée, forgets academical urbanity in wild and incoherent abuse

of living persons and respectable citizens who happen not to think as he does.

This state of affairs has given rise to countless rumours and jokes over the compilation of the eternal dictionary upon which the illustrious company is engaged. How is it possible for men who disagree upon the essentials of morality, justice, honour, and truth to agree upon the definition of a word? In olden days the occasional antagonisms of this renowned salon were rare or were revealed with a sympathetic vivacity and wit. Sainte-Beuve could say: "The Academy is the place where literature is the best discussed and where all the amenities are most rigorously observed." Now all that is changed. Happily, as an interlude in internecine warfare, there is the yearly examination of books and prizes to award. These are many. It is a mistake to believe that a book crowned by the Academy is necessarily good. Noting one year that several absolutely bad, as well as many mediocre, books had been crowned, and sums of money awarded to the malefactor's who had perpetrated them, I asked an academician how it was. His explanation was, that so much must be spent on prizes every year, whether there are books to crown or not, as it would excessively complicate the affairs of such a rich body if these sums were allowed to accumulate. Of course there are certain large prizes, such as the Jean

Reynaud (£400), which are carefully and justly disposed of, but the multiple insignificant ones of £10, £20, and £40, are distributed as well as they can be in days when there is not a plethora of real talent in France. It is not only literary works that merit academical prizes. There is the Montyon prize, awarded to "the poor French man or woman who has done the most virtuous action during the year." The sum spent on prizes under this head is £800, and it is divided between several poor persons whose lives are looked into, and of whom usually a touching and admirable picture is drawn. It would not be in the nature of things if the distribution of this prize did not provoke much humorous comment in France. Some satirists maintain that the candidates for the Montyon prize invariably go to the dogs after they have been rewarded. I was once present at the reading out of the numerous actions so recompensed by M. Brunetière, and I was never more deeply impressed by the splendid record of virtue, of unparalleled abnegation and generosity, among the French poor. The second Montyon prize is destined to reward the most useful moral book written during the year. There are also prizes destined to alleviate literary misfortunes, that is, unfortunate authors or their widows and families in trouble.

The old house of Molière is, like the Academy, a permanent attraction of Paris. It stands in the

Rue de Richelieu, on a Place of its own, a light, animated, illuminated Place, dominated by the columns of the Théâtre Français. This was established here after the Revolution, and, thanks to the famous Decree of Moscow, its name is almost as eternally linked with that of Napoleon as with those of the immortal Molière and of Louis XIV., a more liberal but not less exacting master of France than the Corsican adventurer.

There is not a civilised land that has not something to learn of other lands. While the French may well envy the more stable and self-respecting government of England, England might just as well borrow something of France; and one of the things it ought to envy is the establishment, two centuries ago, of a national theatre. The result for France has been the most perfect dramatic school of the world. The suppression of excessive individuality is a benefit to the entire company, as it forbids any ambition to "star." We have seen what the star system has done for the two great artists who broke away from its traditions to amass fortunes and fling their reputations to all the quarters of the globe. South America has had the privilege of hearing Sarah Bernhardt, but the artist who left the Théâtre Français had genius of a finer quality and theatrical cultivation of a higher order than those displayed to-day by this extraordinary woman in the various more or less

mediocre plays she acts in, often without a single other actor or actress worth listening to. The starring system is essentially the development of all that is worst in the artist—vulgarity, crude bids for personal popularity, blighting vanity, and egotism ; in a word, all the cheapest characteristics of the charlatan. It is precisely these ugly defects that such an institution as the *Comédie Française* tends to suppress. There the reputation of the company and not of the individual is at stake. Minor parts are played by eminent artists, and the excessive vanity and pretension of the one become the plague of the many. I will not advance the assertion that everybody in the famous company of the *Comédie Française* is equally admirable. Temperament will, of course, prompt your criticism. For instance, Mounet-Sully is the beloved of many a nation as well as of thousands of his own countrymen, and I can scarcely listen to Mounet-Sully with patience. A greater bore I cannot conceive. He belongs to the Byronic school, the days of cloaked and sabred romance. His sombre voice lifts itself on a volume of sound, and is flung in mournful and passionate reproach against the implacable walls of destiny. But yet in your most exasperated mood, with nerves on edge from his excess of clouded despair and desperate anguish, you must admit that the man is a perfect artist, and that such a

temperament starring about the globe, without the control of the company to which he belongs, would drift into ineffable charlatanism. Poor M. Claretie has much ado to keep him in order. What would happen if he had a stage of his own to rant and roar upon? A lesser Sarah Bernhardt, without her inexpressible charm and her undoubted genius, which in soft interludes help us to bear with the shrieking, hysteric, high moments. It would be a mistake to regard the Français as a kind of happy family, living in perfect amity and peace. The roar of domestic war sometimes penetrates without, and all Paris was excited lately by M. Le Bargy's noisy menace of resignation. Le Bargy, on his own boards, in his own atmosphere, surrounded by his own company, has made his mark as a well-cravatted, fashionable young lover ; but what will Le Bargy do elsewhere, in a theatre where, with his prestige, and coming from such a house, he will be expected to fill the stage? I doubt if there is the stuff of the star in him, and upon the Boulevards there are many actors as good as and better even than he. This is the triumph of the Français,—that by means of inexorable tradition and training, without individuality or genius, actors acting harmoniously, guided by a common standard, may attain an eminence in their profession achieved in no other land. And though the chances of fortune and popularity are much

greater outside its walls, popular actors are always proud of the honour of election into its illustrious company.

The theatre was founded by Louis XIV., by whom it was made a co-operative association, and who established pensions for retiring members. It has two classes of actors : *sociétaires*, who have each an interest in the theatre, have a voice in its government, a share of the profits, assist at the choice of plays, and retire with a pension. On retirement, they possess not only their pension, but a little capital of their own, the half of their share of the profits of the theatre having been annually invested for them. The second class is composed of *pensionnaires*, engaged yearly at a fixed salary, and at the end of a certain period of probation nominated *sociétaires*. Napoleon chose the most astonishing hour of his astonishing career for consideration of the destiny of the Théâtre Français. At Moscow he diverted his mind from colossal disaster by framing the celebrated Decree of Moscow. The theatre is a State institution, subsidised by an annual vote of 240,000 francs, in return for which it is bound to play the old classical repertory twice or thrice a week. By this means the memory of the masters of the French drama, Racine, Corneille, and Molière, is kept ever green in France, and is not less fresh to-day than that of the modern dramatists.

And so one understands how the entire world was affected by the dreadful catastrophe not long ago in the burning of this great old house. Neither M. Claretie, with his eyes full of tears, nor any of the distracted company was bemoaning a personal loss, was thinking of private interests in sight of the devastating flames ; but all were throbbing, as one heart, before a national calamity. The civilised world felt it had lost a precious and a unique thing. The new building will contain most of the rescued works of art, but the figures of Rachel, of Delaunay, of so many shades of departed dramatic glory, have gone. The new theatre will probably be handsomer than the old one, and it could easily be that ; it will also be more modern, more comfortable ; it may even be fitted up with luxury, and, Heaven permit it ! that horrid national institution, the *ouvreuse*, may be abolished. Blessed changes ! but we of our generation will ever be grateful that it was on the old stage we saw Got and Reichemberg, Worms, Barretta, and Bartet.

L'École des Beaux Arts is another national institution. In all things the French passion for art is visible. Art is the one thing the entire race takes seriously. The capital is laid out to please the eye and captivate the senses like a work of art. This School of Fine Arts itself is connected with one of the most radiant bits of of Paris. The bridge, called after it, seizes

one of the loveliest views of the city. It spans the river between the glorious Louvre and the imposing dome of the Institute. Stand midway, and here, in the heart of modern life, will you find yourself in the midst of enchantment. Let the vision be a morning vision, and the lights about you will be pearly, the blue of the air rose-tinged, the gold of the sun-rays, as it shimmers over the water, broken and tossed against its blithe, persistent grey. Or see it at the magical hour of sunset. All the gilt of the Louvre glistens like living light. Towers and fretted spires are pencilled in the lovely glow, seemingly enlarged by the large serenity of the atmosphere. Below, the roll of the river curls into the deep grey hollows of the mysterious isle whose gates of romance are fittingly guarded by the high towers of Notre Dame, the church that foreigners will persist in regarding as the most beautiful of Paris, and whose architectural value has been absurdly overrated, I suppose because of Victor Hugo ; while Saint Étienne-du-Mont, with its delightful *jubé*, Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, home of poetry, and the exquisite Sainte Chapelle are neglected for this second-rate edifice. On one side Richelieu's dome, fronted by its circling space which breaks the winding, gracious line of quay and bookstalls ; on the other, Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, bending its Gothic shadow to the bright glory of the Louvre, and the

upward view running past bridges and gardens, past the grey temple of legislation, to sweep upon a wide curve into the colonnaded heights of the Trocadero. The picture is enhanced by the bright verdure of the Tuileries gardens ; by the gay, swift passage of boats ; by all the sparkling diversities of Parisian life which fill the streets with so much colour and charm. When you have crossed the Pont des Beaux Arts, on which I have kept you standing awhile, you will enter the school by the busy, old-fashioned, almost provincial Rue Bonaparte. What a pleasant place it is to be sure, this modern school of art ! Here it is that the famous Prix de Rome is given, which sends hopeful youths to the very fount and cradle of art for its instruction and gratification, but not infrequently for the careful destruction of all individuality of sprouting genius in thrall to academic rule. It is the rigidity of this academic rule in France which produces such explosions of anarchy in literature and art. Precision and clarity are such essential characteristics of the genius of the race that, when turbulent youth in a tempest of revolt against the discipline of the implacable academies decides to fling its cap over the mill, and carve out its own fresh road to the devil, we are shocked by eccentricities that elsewhere would leave us unmoved.

If youth must occasionally go mad, at least we

demand that French youth shall go mad with sanity of taste and judgment. His Anglo-Saxon brother in a like predicament may be as imprecise, as vague and obscure, as racial character and the genius of his language permit, but we exact of this raging Gaul that his insanity shall be beautifully measured by the canons of art. And so his excesses in anarchy appear to our judgment far more grievous crimes against taste and tact than those of less intellectually and artistically disciplined races. When he falls away from the lines of beauty his defection is more deplorable than another's. We are accustomed to count upon him as a model of elegance in all the finer paths of pleasure ; and when he dips into crabbed prose or rude verse, or paints us, as a symphony of modern morals, a naked woman playing the piano, with a fashionable hat on a vulgarly dressed head, we resent the hideous joke as evidence of unjustifiable lawlessness. The Prix de Rome may have something to do with these outbreaks. The best art of the world has been spontaneous and not academic ; and though we may admit that training is a priceless advantage in all paths, the individual influence of one master of his craft is far above that of all the academies ever formed. The French in all things depend too exclusively on institutions. They tired of the tyranny of Throne and Church, and overthrew the one and shook the altars of the other.

But the abiding tyranny of institutions they un-murmuringly accept and submit to as their substitution. Louis XIV. and Napoleon ruled the people with a rod of iron ; each combined in his personal prestige and power all the resources of the various institutions which, united, now represent the authority of a single man. The traditions of subservience that they left were not to be shaken off, in spite of revolutions and occasional canters down the wild road of anarchy. There dwell permanently in the race a terror and distrust of individualism and initiative. Since it has shaken off the shackles of kings and dictators, it must walk in willing servitude to the countless smaller, and, it must be admitted, less obnoxious, tyrannies it maintains for the clipping of its own wings, and which form a kind of stable throne for its prestige. For what would France be in the eyes of the world without its five Academies, without its École des Beaux Arts, its Théâtre Français, the house of Molière, without its high literary tradition, the distinction and elegance of all that emanates from its genius ? The liberty of the gypsy is undoubtedly the greatest blessing of life, freedom to paint, to write, to act, to speak, to breathe, by spontaneous and untrammelled effort, freedom to ride upon the crests of inspiration unmindful of the approval of the fogies of tradition, to tilt against the windmills of discord in one's own

manner without a thought for "conservatoire" or national opera-house, to go a-sailing on the lake of dreams, without calculating the benefit it may be to your pocket, and dive for pearls of fancy without reckoning their market value. But civilisation sets too just a value upon the benefits of tradition and discipline to tolerate this nomad contempt of their advantages ; and in no country are these advantages more highly prized than in France, the land of revolution and unrest. Even the follies of the Latin Quarter, as long as they lasted, were rigidly based upon the traditions of that wild spot. *La Vie de Bohème*, for all its apparent recklessness of rowdy students and Mimi Pinsons and Lisettes, had its traditions in vice and virtue, deviation from which was regarded an infraction as intolerable as ever could be deviation from those of the five Academies or the Comédie Française. The student in the process of going to the dogs was bound to go thither in the way of the Quarter. He inherited from a long line of genius his hat and his garments, the cut of his hair and beard, his sins and attitudes. The road of pleasure and pain, of wickedness and repentance, of distraction and despair, was cut out for him upon tradition as unswervable as that of the most respectable institution, and to act the proper part assigned him in the triumph of disreputableness he should take Villon for his model, or wring out the sombre folds of the

poet's mantle in the gaiety and genial ruffianism of the modern ideal of the Latin Quarter. But here, happily, we alight upon an institution in process of doom. The Quarter is in the pangs of transformation, and soon the cheap and unsympathetic heroes of Mürger will be but a memory, and not a decent one at that. Along the "Boul. Mich." youths are beginning to pay their way, for all the world like the common "beastly burgess" across the river.

The Conservatoire is another national institution. Like the Academy and the Comédie Française, it is a home of traditions. The airy foreigner who wishes to assist at one of its concerts cannot hope to open its doors with a golden key. Its seats are subscribed for and constitute personal property. Should the foreigner be fortunate enough to possess a friend with one of these seats who is willing to sacrifice a concert for his benefit, he will hear a marvellous orchestra. For a short time the scene of this unique harmony of sound was shifted from the neighbourhood of the Upper Boulevards to the boards of the Opera-house, and the result was sheer disaster. The orchestra of the Conservatoire is just suited to its own select little hall, but it is too delicate, too perfect, for transposition to a big theatre like the Opera-house of Paris. There you need instrumentation of a coarser quality, music less subtly rendered. Where the polka may be fitly danced,



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the *pavane* would be out of place. M. Taffanel, the able conductor of the Conservatoire orchestra, cannot compare with the great German conductors ; he has not the genius of Mottl, nor the magical temperament of Weingartner, nor the individuality of the French conductor, the late Lamoureux. But in his quiet, measured way he is an incomparable artist, to judge him by the results of his lead. When Weingartner and Mottl conduct, the attention is continually drawn to them. Indeed, in the case of Weingartner, who is unreasonably affected, and, like every other artist with a "temperament," is apt to exaggerate its privileges, the audience is ever more conscious of him than of his instruments. He is a superb master, but one wishes him less histrionic. Now, M. Taffanel has not a suspicion of affectation or histrionism. He is simplicity itself, the very model of impersonality. He so effaces himself that you are conscious of his presence only by the perfection of his orchestra. He is so easy and subdued that he hardly seems necessary in this admirable triumph of art. Of course, as his house is the home of tradition, Wagner is excluded. Wagner dominates outside, but in here it is the masters consecrated by unmixed approval who rule the ear. Mounet-Sully will read to you, in his inimitable, sombre Byronic way, the ravings of Manfred, while Schumann will roll your soul over the crests of

musical passion. Beethoven will speak to your heart and brain like a god, and Mozart will captivate you with his joyous melody and sweetness, but not a note of Wagner, the modern Colossus. It is well that this exclusive home of music should be kept up upon its aristocratic traditions — the best orchestra of the world and the least accessible ; but the evil effect of exclusiveness is at once visible in a glance around at the audience. Daudet has written that the French do not in their hearts really like classical music. I think it is true. They delight too much in conversation to delight in music as the duller, the denser, and more sentimental Germans do. But to have a seat at the Conservatoire denotes wealth, the prestige of fashion ; and so they go to each concert more to see and be seen than to hear. In doing so they are conscious of being part of the *chic* world. In the *loges* around you, men and women talk of every mortal thing except the music heard ; and the chief anxiety of both sexes, if I may judge by the testimony of my ears on repeated occasions, is to know what baron, count, marquis, marchioness, or duchess is present, with smart remarks upon their dress. The Conservatoire is a traditional school of music and of the drama ; prizes are awarded upon the test of examination, and reputations started here which may end in celebrity.



CHAPTER VII

HOME-LIFE IN FRANCE

THERE is no race on the face of the earth whose home-life is so enviable as that of the French. Both men and women bring the best of their qualities to the making and maintaining of this admirable domestic institution. It is, perhaps, too perfect, too wadded, for any people which may hold the theory that domestic happiness is an inferior ideal. It explains to us why the French are bad colonists, why initiative and enterprise are less developed here than in the regions of rougher interiors. The atmosphere of a French home is the most delightful I know. I cannot see why men and women should be expected willingly to tear themselves away from it in search of dubious prosperity and happiness among barbarians. After all, it seems to me that human happiness is as high an ideal as any of us can justly lay claim to ; and if we want our own happiness we are pretty certain to want that of others, for the few who find their happiness in the misery of those

around them are lower than the brutés. In England and in Ireland I have seen men and women of this sort, persons of diseased selfishness, who, in their homes, surrounded by others, live only for themselves, and whose sole mission in life apparently is to render those same victims of their proximity as wretched as possible.

Frenchwomen are not perfect, we know, since they are human. They have their meanesses, their spites, their pettinesses, and jealousies, like others ; they are largely tainted with the vice of avarice, and it cannot be said that they are, in general, capable of climbing the heights of disinterestedness. They love money, and they save it. But, whatever their faults, I dare to say that no race of women can show a smaller percentage of shrews and reckless mischief-makers. Their discretion is extraordinary, and no less extraordinary is the equable, dignified nature of their domestic rule. They have their tantrums like other women, but they are surprisingly free from the vice of scolding. The word "termagant" was never invented for the pleasing and tactful Frenchwoman. She will blight your life by other means should she have that fancy. Economy is her great and unlovable virtue. If she clips the wings of romance so ruthlessly, it is always in the interests of economy. I do not give her ideal as the highest or the noblest ; it is even lower, perhaps, than that

of many other classes of women, since it is exclusively occupied with the state of her own and her progeny's purse. But the process by which she attains this ideal is charming in itself. She cheerfully makes every personal sacrifice needful, and counts herself blest when she places the hand of a son or daughter in that of a suitable match, with fortune proportionate and prospects of equal promise. She lives for her husband and children ; and if, as the fashionable novelists assure us, she often deviates from the path of virtue,—makes, as the boulevardiers say, a rent in the marriage contract,—not even those romancers dare affirm that she neglects, for such caprices, the interests of either.

She is in all things literally the better half of her people. Observe her in all classes, and you will have no further need of explanation of the striking prosperity, strength, and self-sufficiency of France itself. Cheerful, competent, thrifty creature, how could the land that owns her go to the dogs, whatever the decadents and politicians may do ? She is the force of the country, its stable influence and salvation. The home rests upon her, and she makes of it a delicious nest for her children, who may exaggerate the outward form of their love for her, but who can never exaggerate the inward devotion they owe her. She has taught them, it is true, to think too much about money, to be too ready to

dispute the wills of recalcitrant relatives who wish to leave their fortunes to others than themselves ; she has left them too little liberty, and trained them in ignorance of such a virtue as disinterestedness ; she is too apt to encourage her son in the theory of the wild oats-sowing, without even the saving grace of limiting that period to pre-nuptial days, being trained herself in the fixed conviction of her land, that man is a tameless beast who cannot exist without fugitive loves throughout his chequered career. Indeed, I have heard a very pious old French lady assert that a married man may have a hundred mistresses and be a perfectly honest man whom nobody should criticise. When I made respectful mention of the wife's injuries, she shrugged, called me an unsophisticated fool, and said that every sensible girl, on her wedding-morn, understood what she was facing, and, if she were well-bred, she was wise enough to keep her eyes shut. No wife, she maintained, could expect to learn anything to her advantage by prying into her husband's habits and distractions outside the portals of home, and so her wisdom lay in studied ignorance. The thing to prevent in a husband or son was extravagance. So long as the purse-strings remained unloosened, and the health was uninjured, a judicious woman should ask for nothing more from the men around her. For this reason, the novelists show

us the French mother as charmed to discover that her son has started romantic relations with the wife of a wealthy friend. She is convinced that he must have a mistress, and her only hope is that he shall choose one who will not ruin him in purse or in health. Of his heart and happiness in these matters she seems to care not a pin, possibly because of the talent for cynicism possessed by the French, which declines to recognise heart outside the family. If every poison has its antidote, so has every quality its drawback. This beautiful maternal devotion we so admire is practised to the detriment of all outsiders. The French mother would make a holocaust of all humanity on the altar of her offspring's advancement and interest. She will gladly toil for him or for her, save francs and pence for either, deprive herself of what she most loves, accomplish for her child every virtue in the world but that of justice or generosity toward outsiders. For the French *ménagère*, the outsider is the enemy. Indeed, for all the French family the outsider is a reptile to be crushed. Let a wealthy Frenchwoman take a strong fancy to an outsider, and the hostility awakened in the breast of every member against this inoffensive outsider will be found to be a sentiment to which only Balzac could do justice. Sons and daughters, cousins, nephews, and nieces, will combine to slight or insult the reprobate.

In the case of a widower, or an unmarried uncle, marriage is the terror ; in the case of the wealthy woman I suspect the last will and testament arouses the scare. Anyway, whatever the unexpressed sentiment may be, the French family of all classes joins in this unreasonable hatred, suspicion, and jealousy of the outsider. I remember when I first came to Paris many years ago, having a letter of introduction to Madame Blaze de Bury, a very singular and clever old lady, who said to me : " You will find the French as hard as a granite wall when you come to knock against them. To the superficial glance they are so easy, so accessible, so pleasant. Well, I have lived long enough among them to discover that they are just like the Chinese. They hate foreigners, even when they are delightful to them. And this hatred of the foreigner is shown in family life, where the foreigner is everyone who is not a direct relation." Subsequent experience did not prove Madame Blaze de Bury altogether right as regards the foreigner, for I, a foreigner, have found in France kindness, sympathy, generosity, and affection, and all from the French of the very French. In criticising Frenchwomen, I am criticising the part of humanity I like best, appreciate and admire most on earth. Give Frenchwomen the freedom, the liberal education of England, a dash of Protestantism—that is, mental and moral

independence—and you will have womanhood in its perfection. They have little of the snob, they are naturally simple and unpretentious, and they are competent, intelligent, and discreet.

The two features that most strike the foreigner in French home-life are the careful economy practised everywhere, in city and country, among the poor and the rich, and the pretty courtesies and tendernesses which help to keep the wheels of domestic machinery so admirably oiled. The notion that relationship is merely the privilege of making one's self as disagreeable as possible, and indulging in cruelties of speech and action, does not exist in France, or exists in a very diminished degree.

A study of the economies practised in aristocratic and prosperous bourgeois circles in France leads us to strange facts. Taine quotes an incident in his *Carnets de Voyage* that happened in the neighbourhood of Poitiers. A Parisian was hunting by invitation on a friend's lands, and, without knowing it, crossed the border-land of those of a certain viscountess. He was not shooting, but carried his gun under his arm ; he had lost his way. Up came a keeper and stopped him. The Parisian explained the circumstances, and insisted that he was not shooting. His host and he decided to visit the viscountess personally, and put the case before her in order to avoid unjust proceedings. They

were received in a superb chamber hung with tapestries. The viscountess listened to them, and put her hand out : "Twenty francs each to pay," was all she said. I think I can tell a better tale still, that of the interested hospitality of a well-known Flemish countess, whose shooting lands are among the best in France. The guests of this lady who liked a liberal supply of sugar in their morning coffee were obliged to provide themselves with it before coming, for every lump consumed in the castle was counted by the thrifty châtelaine ; and the servants were bound, on penalty of dismissal, to give up to her all the tips they received. These were dropped into a cash-box, and at the proper time were returned to them under the form of wages. The good lady also makes a fine thing of her invitations to shoot upon her land, and may be said to merit a high place in the ranks of economists.

And yet there is much to be said in favour of French thrift, not only for the good it brings to the country, which is immense, but still more for the inappreciable advantages it affords the family, above all, the girls. Go to Ireland and observe with lamentation and indignation the havoc made of home-life, of family dignity, of the lives of unfortunate girls, by the miserable wastefulness of parents. On all sides you will hear sad tales of girls, obliged to work hard for

shocking rates of payment, who were brought up in foolish luxury, whose parents "entertained" in that thriftless, splash, Irish fashion, drank champagne, drove horses, when the French of the same class would be leading the existence of humdrum small burgesses, depriving themselves of all that was not absolutely necessary for their position, and teaching their children the art of counting, of saving, and of laudable privation. The Irish way is the jollier, I admit, but it is a cowardly, selfish way, for it is the children who always have to pay the piper, and, more often than not, the unhappy trades-folk who supply these gay and festive spendthrifts.

We laugh at the counted lumps of sugar in France, forgetting that sugar here is sixpence a pound, and becomes an item to be considered. I remember once feeling some sympathy with the French carefulness of sugar. An Irish girl, whom I did not know, somewhere in the twenties, and consequently supposed to conduct herself like a reasonable being, thrust accidentally upon me for hospitality for a single night,—which, owing to unforeseen circumstances, was prolonged to ten or twelve days,—did me the honour to consume a pound of sugar a day at my expense. In every cup of tea she melted nearly a dozen large French lumps of sugar, and she drank many cups in the day ; also she ate

sugar continually as other women munch sweets, and as she disliked cold red wine, she insisted on heating it with quantities of sugar until it was turned into a syrup. When my grocer sent in his monthly account, with sugar at sixpence a pound in enormous excess, I felt it would be a singular advantage for Ireland if a little judicious thrift were practised in Irish homes. The young lady's father went bankrupt shortly afterwards, and I cannot say I was at all surprised. He was an ordinary burgess, who worked hard to maintain a large and extravagant family, and my guest once told me that her sister frequently ran up a bill at the florist's for boutonnières to the sum of thirty shillings a month, which her father had to pay. French thrift, if it does so often touch hands with meanness, at least implies the exercise of a quality we all should admire, even when we cannot practise it, thanks to taste, training, or temperament—hardness to ourselves, the capacity for voluntary self-suffering.

The first thing that strikes you as you enter a French beeswaxed flat in winter is the chill of it. Few but the very rich know the delights of generous fires, of well-carpeted houses, of warm, comfortable, and luxurious interiors. Silver appointments and splendid napery, which you will find nowadays in the commonest Irish homes, are here unknown, and people of the class who in England dress for dinner here wear the clothes

they have lunched in, and are none the worse off for it. They have, along with their thrift, much less pretension, and are simpler and more intelligent in their home-life than we of the British Isles. In one way they live better, because their food is better cooked and is more varied, and for dinner you are sure to have brighter conversation. In certain rich and snobbish circles, above all in the shooting season, you risk being bored to death, for here nothing is talked of but titles, game, and fortunes. The wonder to me is how women, who themselves do not shoot, can sit placidly through a long afternoon and evening and listen to men who talk incessantly of their own bags or their neighbours' bags—of how the prince shot this snipe, the count shot that partridge, and how many pheasants the marquis bagged. I suppose it is to keep the men in good-humour that these amiable Frenchwomen — against whom I can bring no other charge than vacuity and snobbishness, two parasites of wealth—feign the intensest interest. They are paid in the coin they desire, and if they are bored nobody is a penny the wiser, and they probably do not mind it.

I have said the lack of material comfort and plenty in middle-class French homes is striking. I, of course, refer to people who are not rich, where the husband is a state functionary on a modest salary in Paris, to small professors, to

the wives of military officials, the 'widows of colonels and broken-down aristocrats. I have had a glimpse of all these classes of homes, and in winter found them unseasonably chill and frugal. Thirty years ago, I am assured, it was far worse, for then carpets were unknown, and fires less used than to-day. Such economies are practised here as in England would accompany only harsh poverty, but they must not be taken as the symbol of such. Your grocer and his wife, who eat behind the shop in a sanded and comfortless space walled off, and on Sunday afternoon go out, neatly arrayed in well-fitting but dowdy and serviceable garments, have tidy fortunes stowed away, while their flashy, splash-loving brethren of the British Isles, with their dog-carts, bicycles, and up-to-date attire turned out by fashionable tailors, dressmakers, and milliners, are pulling the devil by the tail and stupidly patronising their betters, who are contented with less display.

I retired lately to Ireland to write this little book, and was struck, after long residence in France, by the violent contrast between French and Irish character in these respects. I was used to the simple, courteous, willing, active trades-people of Paris, who give themselves no airs, dress dowdily, live modestly. I found the same class in Ireland, even in a small village, dressed daily as Solomon in all his glory never

was, with tailor-made gowns worth ten and twelve guineas, and with haughty manners that would bewilder a princess of the blood ; the one cutting the other, Heaven only knows on what assumption of superiority, and all hastening from their counters in smart turnouts, duly to subscribe their loyal names to the list of the Queen's visitors. I felt like Rip Van Winkle—as if I had waked in my native land and found everyone gone mad with pride and pretension. When I ventured into a shop to make an insignificant purchase, a gorgeous dandy with a lisp condescended to attend to me, or a lady looking like a duchess, and most desirous that you should take her for such, dropped from the height of her grandeur to my humble person, and was good enough in her superior way to look after me. Everybody was seemingly so above trade or business or bread-winning of any kind that I was glad enough to pack up my papers and things and come back to a race more simple and less pretentious, where the people work with good-will, and sell you a yard of tape or a hat without insufferable condescension, and where tradesmen and their wives do not think it necessary to confer on crowned heads the honour of their call. In pursuit of my investigations on this subject I was taken to the house of a very small trades-person, who lived over her shop. The owner wore a twelve-guinea

silk-lined gown trimmed with Irish point. I could well imagine what sort of residence hers would be in France. For Ireland it was a sort of Aladdin surprise. Majesty indeed might have sat in that sitting-room. It was furnished with faultless taste: beautiful old Sèvres, proof engravings exquisitely framed, buhl cabinets; everything—curtains, chairs, sixteenth-century benches and couches, quaint ornaments, the spoils of frequent auctions of gentlemen's houses—was chosen with the best of judgment by an ignorant peasant woman, whose bringing up, surroundings, and life had been of the most sordid kind. I was shown the bedroom, and found it a no less pleasing and surprising vision, a nest of modern luxury and beauty, such a bedroom as in Paris you would see only along the handsome and expensive avenues.

Another time I obtained a glimpse of the home of a bankrupt widow of a "little burgess" who had had to vacate a house with grounds to take up her residence in a more modest dwelling. Such a woman in France would be content to live and die a very plain and simple person, and, having had to compound with her creditors, would have considered herself bound to lay out her new existence upon lines of the most rigid economy, above all, as there was a large family of sons and daughters not yet of an age, nor having the requisite education, to provide for

themselves. The house I visited was one of a row, a poor, mean quarter, where no sane person would look for any appearance of affluence. Over the fan-light the house rejoiced in an imposing Celtic name in three words in raised white letters, not the cheapest form of house nomenclature. A gardener was engaged trimming the infinitesimal garden front ; the youngest girl, of twelve, was mounting her bicycle to career off with a companion ; in the hall were three other bicycles belonging to different members of the family. The furniture of the drawing-room was new and expensive, and a young lady was playing up-to-date waltzes on the piano, without a trace of concern or anxiety ; no sign anywhere of economy, of sacrifice, of worry. Yet I knew I was entering a house where there was practically nothing to live upon, and where the proceeds of a sale that should have gone to the woman's creditors had been squandered on unnecessary things. One may criticise the meannesses to which thrift drives the frugal French, but I never felt more near to falling in love with what is to me an uncongenial vice than I did on leaving my native land after this visit, to have commercial dealings once more with people not above their business, instead of trading with the spurious descendants of kings, whose sole anxiety is to make you feel their social superiority and extraordinary condescension,

to find these excellent French "little people" all that Lever told us the Irish were but have ceased to be—cordial, delightful, intelligent, and simple. For that is the great, the abiding charm of the French middle class—the absence of vulgar pretension. Every man to his trade, and an artist at that—such is the wise French motto. I begin to suspect the late Felix Faure, the tanner of France, must have had some Irish blood in his veins, for he was well worthy to play the sovereign to that mock prince of the blood, the Irish tradesman.

The home of the French middle classes, I have already said, is not, in the Anglo-Saxon conception of the word, an abode of comfort. Small economies are too rigidly practised therein. The *salon*, or sitting-room, is apt to be shut up all the week in the interest of the furniture, and only opened on the single afternoon the lady of the house is supposed to be at home to her friends. Then in winter, just before the hour of reception, the meagre wood-fire is set ablaze, and sometimes tea is prepared, along with biscuits far from fresh. You may be thankful—if tea is to be offered you, a rare occurrence—should the tea be no staler than the biscuits, I have known a Frenchwoman, the sister of a professor at Stanislas College, who admitted to me naïvely that she changed the leaves of her tea every four or five days. She informed me

that this economical hint was given her by a Scotchwoman, who assured her that in Scotland nobody was extravagant enough to make fresh tea every day. I hope this Scotchwoman was an invention of the Frenchwoman. It would be terrible to believe that all the families of Scotland drink their daily dose of slow poison. In winter also are the two meals of noon and evening consumed in a frigid atmosphere, for such a thing as a dining-room fire is unheard of in the class I refer to. The napery will be of the coarsest quality, and oftener coloured than white.

The house is generally run with a single maid-of-all-work, who receives a monthly wage of from thirty to forty francs, and her life is not an easy one. The lady already referred to had her *bonne* from the country, where existence is still harsher than in Paris, and paid her thirty francs a month. The unfortunate *bonne* for this sum had to wash, clean, scour, cook, market, make beds, and sew. The lady was pious, and a philanthropist, but pious and philanthropic persons are sometimes harsh taskmasters, and not infrequently dishonest. The *bonne* was obliged, out of her scant wages, to pay a hundred francs a year for her bedroom, which was merely a box under the roof, without ventilation or fireplace, so that in winter she froze, and in summer she was baked. She also had to buy her own wine

and coffee, if she needed either, and never, from week's end to week's end, tasted of dessert or sweets, or knew what it was to dine off fowl, when by rare chance fowl was served at table. I was this lady's "paying guest" for four or five months ; and if my lot was a hard one, I could console myself with the reflection that the servant's was infinitely harder. True, the servant did not, as I did, pay an exorbitant price for those discomforts, but we could both say that we had to deal with a singularly pleasant, affable, well-spoken, and agreeable woman, surprisingly intelligent, who kept her house in admirable order. She was secretary for several Catholic philanthropic works, and taught catechism, for a consideration, to poor children in some disreputable quarter of Paris. I thought of her, as I have thought of many another Christian philanthropist, Catholic and Protestant, how much more in keeping with the doctrine of Christ it would be to stay unpretentiously at home and practise the modest virtue of honesty, doing unto others as one would be done unto. On her way to her catechism class she would drop in to the woodman's to order wood for me, as a favour for which it was my duty to thank her, pay the woodman three francs, and virtuously charge me five in the bill. I was ill, and in the same spirit of benevolence she ordered everything needful for me—*for a consideration.*



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For all that, she was the nicest, the cheerfulest, and most pleasing robber and humbug I have ever known. I defy any Anglo-Saxon to give the fleeced as much value in the way of agreeable speech and cordiality and beaming smiles as this religious Norman lady gave me. She broke the heart of a trusting friend, and, having gracefully beggared her, drove her to America ruined and embittered, yet went on her own confident way along the path of virtue, assured of nothing more than her indisputable right to a seat in Paradise.

But she was not the first to initiate me into the economical mysteries of the French home. Before this I had been the "paying guest" of a native of Burgundy with an Alsatian title as long as an Alexandrian verse. She professed to have known Lamartine in her youth, and when I spoke of the poet by his name, she corrected me with a grand and reproving air: "Mademoiselle, we of Macon say *Monsieur de Lamartine*." Here the same mysteries of locked *salon* all the week round, open only for a few hours on the famous reception day of Madame la Baronne; the same absence of plenty at the board—lunch for three persons invariably three boiled eggs, three tiny cutlets and three boiled potatoes, three little rolls and three small apples. Never a fourth of anything, should one of the three happen to be a little hungrier than the other two. Only, as I had to

do with a broken-down aristocrat, there reigned, instead of the beaming cordiality of the bourgeoisie, an awful, desperate, glacial reserve. The baroness' attitude to life may be described fitly as resembling her attitude to the late lamented poet, whom she apostrophised stiffly as *Monsieur de Lamartine*. She was frightfully dignified, even in starving her unfortunate paying guest on twelve pounds a month. It is true, paying guests are not infrequently regarded by ladies as creatures predestined to starvation and prompt payment in their hands, and in business matters I can safely say, from singularly sharp experience, that there are no more heartless and rapacious landladies on the face of the earth than needy and educated women. The greed of the common woman runs to pence, while that of the lady runs to shillings ; and whereas the former, when she is dishonest, has a lingering consciousness of it, and flies into a wholesome rage on detection, the latter is armoured in the brass of breeding, and looks cool and surprised that you should object to being fleeced by her. Upon any approach to complaint, instead of excuses, she shows you cynically that she took you in in order to fleece you. A French "woman of letters," in the lowest acceptance of that unpleasant term, the old, semi-extinguished type of bluestocking, once told me that she always calculated on making a clear profit of two hundred

francs a month on the board of her "paying guest," otherwise she did not regard herself as having made a good thing out of it. As she charged a hundred francs a month for a bedroom, twelve pounds a month was the sum she counted upon as legitimate profit. Her terms were sixteen pounds a month — light, fire, afternoon tea, and wine extras—so that the unfortunate fleeced one had exactly the value of four pounds for the sixteen disbursed. Needless to say, this literary hostess only found stray fools from perfidious Albion, recommended by amiable folk over-seas, who guilelessly believed the young ladies despatched to her would enjoy the benefit of exalted social relations, since titles were never out of her mouth, and upon her own description of herself she entertained daily the highest of the land. She traded upon the British weakness for titles, but took care to conceal from these gulled ones the fact that French doors, whether of nobles or of commoners, are not easily opened to foreigners, and never to "paying guests," whom the careful French fear as possible adventurers.

I have heard English people criticise the parsimony of the first French breakfast, because you generally find a couple of lumps of sugar on the side of your saucer instead of a sugar-bowl, and a pat of butter and a single small roll instead of the domestic loaf and a butter-basin. I own I give my preference altogether to the dear,

neat little French tray. When I go on visits to friends in France, I find nothing so charming as to be wakened every morning by a beaming Frenchwoman of the people, whose manners are always so perfect, who is a human being, and not, like the well-trained English servant, a machine ; who opens the shutters and lets in light with her fresh, soft "Good-morning," and approaches the bed with a small, dainty tray, exquisitely laid ; such coffee or chocolate as you will get nowhere else, and everything so trim and minute — the two lumps of sugar, the tiny pat of butter, the hot roll — what ogre could demand more on returning from the land of dreams ? Naturally, the English fashion calls for a more liberal supply, because there you are cleansed, combed, and buckled in the shackles of civilisation downstairs, perhaps after a morning run — and the scent of bacon and eggs is refreshing to the keen nostril. But more than this neat little French tray contains would be too much in a bedroom, and nobody but that Irish girl I referred to, with morbid taste, could clamour for a sugar-bowl to sweeten a single cup of coffee.

Then mid-day, when the sun is high in the heavens, gathers the family round the second breakfast-table. Amongst the well-to-do this is a meal to shame the frugal British luncheon. It consists of an *entrée*, a roast dish, vegetables,

a cold dish, a sweet, dessert, and cheese. No need to mention the cooking. That is sure everywhere to be excellent, though even among French cooks there are grades. Here you will of a surety not be struck by the pervasion of economy, but that of plenty. You will understand why the comfortably-off French, when they lunch at British tables, lament that they are starved. Indeed, when you have the good luck to partake of French hospitality, you will find it the best in the world. At no tables will you eat so well and so plentifully as at the tables of your French friends, and in no land on earth will you enjoy such delightful conversation as theirs, where they know how to speak and have something to say. In England people are always on their guard, are often afraid to talk their best, lest they shall prove bores or eccentrics. In France the bore is the person who has nothing to say, and the eccentric is thanked for frankly revealing himself as such. Only be intelligent, be individual and interesting, and then you may rattle on to your liking, and provided you tumble with glory, you may choose between the devil and the deep sea with equal unconcern. The people around you, the most susceptible and sympathetic to individual value, will be far too busy listening to what you have to say—provided it is worth the saying—to give a thought to picking you to pieces.

In spite of the romancers and all, the twaddle they talk in the interest of the psychological novel, there are no women capable of warmer and more generous friendships than Frenchwomen, none capable of a deeper, discreeter, more abiding loyalty. They are astonishingly indulgent, too, which is part of their great sense, and even their intolerance, where it exists, they have the grace to clothe in the suavity of tact. If they talk, as they too often do, a great deal of nonsense about the English, and cherish vast illusions about their own nation, this is only in the nature of things, seeing that there is no race in the world brought up in more astonishing ignorance of every other race, and more trained to cherish denser prejudices. At school they learn only French geography, French history, French grammar. The rest of Europe comprises mere congested districts round France ; and while it takes several volumes to learn the history of France, the history of other peoples may be told in a few paragraphs. Boys may fare differently, but in my time this is how French girls were taught. England, as the traditional enemy, must necessarily expect rough treatment at the hands of the French ; and in a country where the Press is a blatant monument of misrepresentation, the women cannot be wiser than their country, led by such a disastrous influence. French prejudices against England are as substantial and

impenetrable as the walls of Pekin ; you may ride round them, marvel at them, but never hope to demolish them. But the French mind that manages to keep outside these walls becomes surprisingly enlarged, and then you need ask for no finer or more generous judgment. It needs this finish of magnanimity to so sympathetic a character, rare though it be in France,—for magnanimity is the last quality we may allow the race in general,—to show us how delightful the French can become. For this you must look among the cultured workers of France, the thinkers, the teachers, and men of science. These alone—and they are not loved for it—can recognise and tell the truth about even the mediæval enemy, perfidious Albion.

Frenchwomen of all classes live much more in their bedrooms than Englishwomen do. Of a morning they study, read, work there, give orders to their servants, write letters. These bedrooms are generally very pleasant places, with dressing-rooms off, and clothes closets, so that intimate friends of either sex may pass in and out without indiscretion or awkwardness. The bed itself is a handsome piece of furniture, with curtains to match the big bed-cover, which hides every atom of white, and sometimes, with the pillows in the middle and silk or satin-covered bolster at either end under this covering, it resembles those imposing mediæval

couches we see in the Cluny Museum. On the other hand, the sexes in family life are more apart than in England. They meet at table, but their amusements, interests, and work are accepted as widely different. The relations of husband and wife are based upon a more intelligent understanding than elsewhere ; and those of parent and child are the nearest approach to perfection with which I am acquainted, if only a higher moral training were added to the tenderness and incessant care, for the French wife and mother is undoubtedly the best of her kind ; and if her mate is less worthy, at least he is a kinder, more considerate, and courteous mate than his Anglo-Saxon brother. His sins, when he is volatile and bad, run to the *cabinet particulier* or the *foyer* of fast theatres, while the other flies to perdition on the fumes of alcohol, and sins against home in public bars, upon race-courses, in the hostels of fugitive dalliance. The Frenchman will tell you that he is the better man of the two, for he brings a little sentiment into his infidelities, while the Anglo-Saxon, when he turns his back upon home and the domestic virtues, is brutal and gross.

I think there is something to be said for the erring Frenchman in his frailty. Lisette, while her reign lasts, is somebody for him whom he must study and consider, to whom he is bound to be kind, until he makes up his mind to leave

her, or until she leaves him. But this is not a point I need dwell on. In the matter of virtue, the Britishers make themselves out to be such honest, invulnerable fellows, unlike the chattering, bragging sinners on the other side of the Channel, that it is only the state of the public streets of Great Britain at nightfall that fronts us with the universal charge against them of Pharisaism. And so I come back to my contention, that since infidelity to the marriage vow does exist, the light-headed sons of France choose the more open way of sinning. Their view of the case, as expressed in their fiction, is frankly odious, and, on his own showing, there is something essentially unclean in the Frenchman's mind, though I have always found his conversation fastidiously correct and inoffensive, and it is sad to think of such a fine and splendid race of women playing the unsavoury *rôle* they are made to play by the dramatists and novelists of their land. The women, of course, must be greatly to blame for the misesteem expressed in their regard by their fashionable and popular writers. Too fearful of displeasing, and too sensitive to Gallic ridicule, they do not understand that it rests with them to claim and obtain the respect due to them. They applaud and admire the writers who most persistently degrade them under the flattering guise of a passionate interest and concern. They, who so

wisely dominate at home, have seemingly little or no objection to play the animal on paper. Of course there is a cultured and distinguished class who detest the modern fiction and plays of their country, who protest against them at home and in the Press, who will tell you they read only foreign novels, to avoid being dragged through the mire of their own.

This brings me to the consideration of woman's *rôle* in France. The foreigner who only judges that *rôle* from the novels he reads, mostly pornographic, and from the drama, increasingly gross and immoral, will be all at sea as regards the part woman plays in French life. He will conceive her first playing the hypocrite up to the time of marriage, and then living without restraint ever afterwards. He will wonder what time is left her for domestic duties, and judge her social duties merely as convenient stages along the downward path. If he enjoys that sort of thing, she will amuse and interest him, but he will underestimate her position in reality. For no one plays a more important *rôle* in the ranks of humanity than the Frenchwoman. She it is who rules the home, and in what an admirable way she rules it can never be sufficiently extolled. She it is who trains, fashions, guides man in every step of his career, from his boyhood into his first love-affair, and makes of him the courteous and indulgent creature he proves in matrimony. As

mother, aunt, sister, wife, and daughter, the Frenchman relies on his womankind throughout his whole career. She is, in the best and fullest sense of the word, his helpmeet ; assists him in his business, enjoys his entire confidence, because he knows so well that she is the better part of the institution, bears more than half of his troubles. As a mother, she knows how to efface herself, and in acting to her sons as their best friend and confidant, keeps her sovereignty stable. It is because she is such a sensible and dignified ruler, indulgent where indulgence is needful, that the men around her rarely feel the impulse to break from her sway. She moulds the politicians, takes the poets and novelists by the hand, holds the social sceptre with ease and charm, pulls the academical wire-strings, aids youth to success and triumph, names the fashion in literature,—and here she does less wisely and less well,—makes and mars reputations, is responsible for more of the commercial prosperity of the land than her mate, and brought, of her own thrift and labour, a bigger share to the millions that went to Germany than he. An England without her women could be conceived as still standing, so effaced is their *rôle* ; but France may almost be said to exist by hers. If the women would only consent to go to the colonies, the French would, I am convinced, turn out capital colonists.



CHAPTER VIII

PEASANT AND ARTISAN

FROM earliest youth I had been accustomed to the trim and pleasing aspect of the French peasant, but lived long in Paris without ever having had occasion to examine this class more closely than a walk in the country permits. I chanced to summer one year in the Saintonge, and friends made me acquainted there with an excellent miller and his wife who dwelt upon their lands. I published in the *Speaker* something about these delightful people afterwards, and I cannot do better than quote from that forgotten source :

“In the Saintonge, as elsewhere, the local mood is ruled by politics, and private friendship gives way to public rivalry. I learnt all about these feuds from my friend the miller of La Pellouaille. Intellect was not his strong point, but there was a cheerful cynicism about him to lend flavour to his commonplaces. While others affected the heroic or patriotic, he was content to accommodate himself to circum-

stances. In reply to my query—to which party he belonged—he said, with a humorous smile, ‘*Dame*, I go with the strongest, naturally,’ which did not prevent him from giving his own sly hit at the Government. I give his views for what they are worth—neither brilliant nor original, but expressed with a certain geniality of tone and temper that kept him from bucolic dulness. If the Republic kept France out of mischief for the next twenty years, and carried her into fair prosperity, he believed, by that time, neither Bonapartist nor Legitimist would be remembered. For the moment the land was in a state of ferment, and he thought it a pity such excessive use should be made of those big words, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. These three republican assurances he qualified as mere *blagues*; and told me of a jocose tobacconist who wrote them on the sign-board of his shop, with an empty tobacco-pouch suspended from each, the pouches in France being called *blagues*. But the miller’s wife was certainly his pleasanter half. It was a delight to look upon a creature so human and wholesome and resourceful. She was a large, handsome woman, with a smile as fresh as new milk, and hazel eyes as clear as daylight, beaming with good-will, with vitality, and interest in her fellows. The kine browsing in the fields were not more mild. Such a woman has you right at nature’s heart—big and broad

and bountiful. She is peasant in the best sense, proud of her spotless cap and apron, free and independent in her carriage, with shoulders that know no cringing stoop and voice that cannot whine."

This good creature took me rambling through the woods, she picking the nuts, and I devouring them ; and I found her talk ever sensible and entertaining. Thanks to the natural good manners and intelligence of the French people, there is far less difference than in England between the uneducated and educated classes. My friends of the mill honoured me once with an invitation to dinner. The sky was menacing, and, as I entered the long park avenue whence the mill was visible, I saw the miller and his son anxiously scanning the heavens and the green-roofed aisle of walnut and sycamore by which I came. They hailed me with vigorous welcome, and, as I rested in their beautifully clean kitchen, with broad and generous fireplace, where the wood crackled pleasantly, and shone upon polished brass dogs and gleaming bronze pots, with the high French bed in the deep recess, the miller's wife mixed me some *cassis* and water. A more excellent dinner I have never eaten than that cooked, without fuss, or haste, or delay, by the miller's wife. In a twinkling, as it seemed to me, she had savoury tomato-soup on the table ; and while she laid the cloth, the

millers sat in front of the capacious mouth of flames, and saw that the browning chicken was kept moist with grease. I told them the story of Alfred and the cakes, and the miller's wife cried, "She struck a king—a peasant just like myself!" "*Dame,*" laughed the miller, "it does n't make much difference, when it is a woman, whether she be queen or peasant!" And I thought the remark one that an English peasant would have been incapable of making. He would have been incapable of such a point of view.

The French peasant has not the charm of the Irish peasant—the women, above all, lack the lovely complexion and beautiful eyes of the Irish—and he has less of the grand air. He is much more the son of the soil and less of the gentleman. The writer, wishing to be true to life, could never make such enchanting "copy" out of him as Jane Barlow made of the Irish peasant in her delightful *Idylls*. There is too little poetry about him, and he is too evenly balanced and cool-headed to offer us many of the adorable surprises of humour. I have heard it said, by French persons who live in the country, that Zola comes nearer to truth and reality in his presentment of the peasant than George Sand in her exquisite pastorals, or M. René Bazin in such a tender and lovely story as *La Terre qui Meurt*. But Balzac himself did not weave us tales of romance and delicate feeling when he touched

upon the theme ; and so it is very likely that the fellow is more of a brute than he seems to be in casual intercourse, without, however, sinking to the loathsome depths of the realism of *La Terre*. I, when I recall him to mind, own that I ever see him a dignified, well-mannered figure in blue blouse, generally clean, sometimes incredibly patched by his thrifty wife, frugal, sober, hard-worked, not too garrulous, and yet not resentful of easy speech, nor suspicious of the stranger who accosts him with courtesy. I find him in all things, as he presents himself to the eye and offers himself for observation, the superior of his British brother Hodge, neither so gross nor so unintelligent, with a look in his eye much resembling humour. He has his demands upon life, too, which are not those of the clownish brute, the inarticulate rustic. Not for nothing was the Revolution made, since by it has he learnt that he has his own share in the joys of civilisation, and that if he work hard enough his sons may aspire to such a measure of education as a harsher lot denied him. When business brings him into a little town or a great city, his eye alights on beautiful objects, placed there as much for him as for the owners of seigneurial dwellings. Flowers, trim parks, legends in stone, splendid cathedrals, every gracious blending of line and colour, combine to train his eye in beauty and refine his nature. He need thread



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these quaint and lovely streets with no slouching step, for he, and such as he, are too conscious of their stable efforts in the general work of order and national prosperity. He need touch his forelock to no great lord for permission to breathe the free air of heaven, for does not he, too, possess his bit of land, his little dwelling, from which none can oust him? And, on feast-days and Sundays, are there not always public museums at hand for his instruction and entertainment? No country in the world takes such care to provide museums for the people throughout all the provinces as France. Every year the State purchases pictures at the annual exhibitions of Paris to add to these provincial collections; and in every little town you pass through you are personally urged by some native to visit the Musée. This fact may have something to do with the astonishing intellectual superiority of the French peasant over Hodge beyond the Channel. For the fact remains that you can talk to the blue-bloused son of the soil and hope to learn something from him, when the absence of loquacity and ideas and manners in Hodge will leave you discouraged and in despair. The French peasant loves so many things that educate and refine—flowers and pictures and military bands, spectacles of all kinds, and independence.

His standard is by no means an exalted one.

His frugality is practised in the interest of his old age. His honesty is chiefly, I suspect, a shrewd protection against the probable dishonesty of others, for the simple law of comradeship demands that you shall treat fairly the man who treats you fairly. And his religion does not go down as deep as his soul, or whatever may serve him as such. It is with him merely a material influence, since it furnishes a serviceable plank for getting safely across the perilous abyss into a better world, and enables him to be decently baptised, married, and buried as a member of a Christian community. All other phases of religion—its emotions, exactions, penalties, and devices—he leaves to the foolish women-folk. Indeed, this seems to be the conviction of the average male Catholic the world over, if I may except Ireland, the one Catholic country in which I have found men to take their religion seriously, and the little Celtic corner of France, where the blue-eyed Bretons so closely resemble them. When I have visited at a French country-house in the shooting season, I have never known a male guest to attend mass, the explanation given being that *la chasse* had begun before the hour of mass. But if a woman stayed away from mass she would create a scandal. In Spain I have seen acquaintances of mine, while their women-folk knelt and prayed with fervour, stand throughout the Sunday service with a

bored and perfunctory air, only looking towards the altar and the priest at the moment of the elevation of the Host in a casually respectful way, as an officer might salute the passage of a military chief, and seemingly relieved to be able to examine again the faces and dresses of the women about them. Children barely in their teens, young lads going to school, carefully imitate this attitude of merely tolerant recognition of religious form, and their elders never dream of encouraging them to use a prayer-book, or kneel, or show any sign that the weekly mass is to them more than the bored attendance at an official ceremony.

What is a moral influence with them? High above religion is their sturdy passion for independence. It is this passion that enables them to scrape, and serve, and suffer privation with dignity and patience. However meagre their resources may be, they are content with their lot, provided the roof they sleep beneath is their own, the land they till their own, the goat, the pig, the poultry, theirs to do with what they will. This is no mean standard, and it works miracles in France. Would they were by nature and instinct kinder to their beasts ! but this, too, is not a Catholic characteristic. I am assured that the Bretons and Provençals are the worst offenders. However, they do not sink so low in cruelty to animals as the purely Latin races,

like the callous Spaniards and the Italians ; and even in France the condition of animals is considerably ameliorated, though horses and donkeys are still often maltreated, and geese are killed in the cruelest fashion, their prolonged agonies, in peasant esteem, lending flavour to the cooked flesh.

What should, however, be a source of perennial admiration is the extraordinary absence in this class of anything approaching snobbishness. The eternal simplicity and unpretentiousness of the race are my constant wonder and delight. You will see a man in blue blouse, his wife in spotless cap and coloured kerchief, the man in appearance and fashion of speech and manners a gentleman, the woman educated, with her *brevet supérieur*, not destitute of music or art, working and living like peasants because they are working their own land, and receiving on lines of perfect equality their humbler neighbours, without any thought of giving themselves the vulgar airs so common in my own land and in England. When they take their well-earned holiday at the seaside or among mountain waters, you will rarely find them seeking to pass for other than they are, or talking loudly of their advantages of fortune or station. Their natural dignity is such that they are content to abide by it and be judged accordingly. This class of the French race may be described as the least vulgar, the

least boastful of the world. With these cleanly and self-respecting toilers there is no insane aping of the idler, no cheap imitation of the *bourgeoise* in dress, no awful spectacle of girls with hideous feathers and hats the grossest assertion of ill-placed ambition. Finery of any kind is recognised as the advertisement of something worse than bad taste,—of the bonnet gone clean over the mill and morals gone after it. The peasant woman's vanity is to dress as her mother dressed before her, her pride is to belong to her land and her people. And it is because of this wholesome vanity and this noble pride that France is France, and the land is such a pleasant one to travel over.

This hard-working race is not without its amusements. It must, as I have said, have its share of the joys of life. They are never too tired after a day's work to dance to the music and measure of song, which they love ; and whenever you chance upon them congregated for diversion, whether at a fair, on a moonlit sward, over a hilarious meal, you will always find their behaviour seemly and their gaiety attractive and measured. If the feathers and hats of holiday trim of Great Britain are lacking here, so also are the repulsive giggles and the hateful love-making of those latitudes. The French, we know, are not patterns of virtue, but they certainly are patterns of deportment

abroad. In that clever little book, *The Island*, Mr. Whiteing depicts the love-making of this class in England as certainly the worst enemy of the French could never write with any semblance of truth of the same portion of the race in France. "Like their North-American sisters, fond of feathers and bright hues. No gaudier thing in nature than the coster-girl in her holiday dress of mauve, with the cruel plume that seems to have been dyed in blood. Relation of female to male, singular survival of primitive state. Love-making always, in form at least, an abduction of the virgin. A meeting at the street corner in the dusk for the beginning of the ceremony ; then a chase round the houses, the heavy boots after the light ones, with joyous shrieks to mark the line of flight ; after that the seizure, the fight, with sounding slaps for dalliance that might knock the wind out of a farrier of the Blues. In the final clutch skirts part in screeching rents, feathers strew the ground. Then the panting pair return hand in hand to the street corner, to begin again." Of the meeting of these dreadful lovers later in the public-house Mr. Whiteing adds—and here, too, he paints a picture exclusively British, that never could be seen in France : "Nightfall brings them together at the universal rendezvous from every near or distant scene ; men and those that were once maidens, mumbling age and swearing

infancy, stand six deep before the slimy bar, till the ever-flowing liquor damps down their fiercest fires, and the great city is once more at rest. The imagination of him that saw hell could hardly picture the final scene." And yet you will read such things printed of the French not immediately under your inspection that make you ask yourself if the rowdy love-making and public-house bars constitute the worst possible degradation of humanity. The most obvious, the most offensive assuredly, but not the least innocent. M. Octave Mirbeau has recently done me the honour to send me his latest book, *Le Journal d'une Femme de Chambre*. Not even Zola could conceive a more terrible indictment against his own race. All classes are therein depicted as equally corrupt, shameless, brutalised by irrepressed and irrepressible vice, — nobles, *bourgeoisie*, servants of both sexes, city and country folk, artisans and peasants. The book has an air of sincerity, of being the truthful record of a lady's-maid's career in Paris and in the country, so that one cannot discuss it as mere vicious raving, and every character introduced is worse than the one that went before. I question if humanity has ever been dragged into such infamous depths with such a singular display of enjoyment in its degradation. I read such charges, and I am stupefied with their divergence from my own personal experience. The French

servants I have known have all been excellent creatures, devoted to their mistresses, grateful for any kindness or interest shown them, surprisingly intelligent, honest, sober, of lives of conspicuous virtue. They have the national failing, which is a tendency to insolence on slight provocation—for you cannot reason with French people. They fire up angrily at the least hint of an opinion that displeases them, and their very independence of character makes them sin on the other side of servility. But those monsters of their fiction—where are they to be met with? How do they manage to hide themselves so cleverly from daily scrutiny, if they are, as we are assured, so persistently around us? Have any of the sweet-mannered Eugénies, the Irmas, the Marguerites, the Louises, I meet at the different houses of my friends, who greet me with such cheerful welcome, who take my umbrella or cloak with such suggested sympathy, and put fresh flowers in my room with such graceful pleasure, anything in common with M. Mirbeau's unspeakable wretch, Mlle. Celestine?

The same admiration I am compelled to entertain for the French peasant, I feel for the French artisan, whether in town or country. Yet he, too, has been depicted as a creature of loathsome perversity; but I can only speak of him as I have found him. Some years ago, going from Cognac to Angoulême, I decided to abandon

the dull, incommunicative travellers of the second class and try my chances among the loquacious third-class voyagers. Here I fell into the very midst of good-humoured, general conversation, and learnt more about the stirring local events of Cognac and Angoulême than I should have known after a week's residence in either town. A young girl with a round, baby face addressed me in excellent English, so evidently beaming with the joy of being able to do so that I lavished my congratulations instantly, and learnt that she had been for two years a nurse in Warwickshire, where she had picked up fluent English and met with so much kindness and innocent pleasures of all sorts that she adored the name of England ever afterwards. Certainly not a sister of M. Mirbeau's ineffable Mlle. Celestine, this dear, sentimental little maid of Angoulême. It was a case of attraction at first sight, for she begged of me to use her room instead of going to a hotel, and be her guest at her father's, a little watchmaker, during the three days I projected staying at Angoulême. I accepted, enchanted at a proposal that offered me such an out-of-the-way and original glimpse of a French town. "Sweetness and light" are words that best describe this delicious little creature. She was like a round, innocent kitten, all gaiety and brightness, and sparkled and danced along the streets beside me, crazy with the delight of

talking English again. Girls, she moaned dejectedly, were most unhappy creatures in France; they had no pleasures, no freedom. She could not take her beautiful big dog Tom, given her as a puppy in Warwickshire, out for a walk because it is not proper in France for a young girl to be seen out-of-doors with a dog. Poor little martyr, she did not look much of a victim, and missing and yearning for the larger ways of England had not thinned or paled her rosy, vivacious, round visage. Here she was, as happy as a queen because she was going to sleep on her grandmother's sofa that a stranger from whom she would take no money might sleep comfortably in her bed. She insisted on carrying my bag, too, as if that were another beaming source of satisfaction; and as we trudged blithely up from the valley of the station to the quaint street in which a quaint, dim-eyed old man lived and made and mended watches in an altitude rivalling the stars, I saw that Jeanne was a popular personage. Not this the timid French girl who slips in and out of life unnoticed, and says, *Oui, monsieur; Non, monsieur*, to the trousered wolves. The station-master cast her a cordial nod; the doctor, climbing into his gig, heard her speak English, and turned with a big, gruff laugh as he waved his hand to her. "There's Mlle. Jeanne, happy at last. She is able to calumniate us all in good English to an

insolent foreigner. *Pauvres de nous!*'' and wherever we went together those three days, I saw that the townspeople in shops, down by the river the boatmen and boys, the women who showed us over the museum and over the town-hall, the Alsatian manager of Laroche Joubert's huge paper factory, whither Jeanne and I drove next day, the servants at the Duc de la Rochefoucauld's castle, all knew, admired, and respected Jeanne, the artisan's daughter and Warwickshire nurse. She was not pretty nor distinguished, she dressed like a dowdy nurse, and wore cotton mittens, but I would I knew anybody in her position who could attain such popularity in a town like Angoulême out of France. And all with the utterest simplicity, and an excellent breeding. A heart-broken shoemaker, a melancholy widower, who wanted her for wife, came to me and begged me to use my influence in his behalf. He confided to me the tale of his love, and felt sure that if Jeanne were urged to marry him in the language of Shakespeare she would consent. She brought in to be introduced to me a soldier to whom she was teaching English, a nice, mild young fellow, who told me with gravity that in order to keep himself abreast of English literature he had subscribed to *Pick Me Up* for himself and Jeanne, getting this luminous organ from Bordeaux. The doctor and his wife invited Jeanne to take her foreign lion

over one evening, and we were made much of, and given syrup and water to drink. We stayed out shockingly late of nights, for there was a splendid moon and I could not be torn from the river. But when we entered on our upward toil along the dark and silent streets, Jeanne would say : "Talk English very loud. It is a woman's best safeguard in France." She called the English tongue "*a coup de pistolet* in French ears." So whenever she saw a silhouette in uniform, she fired off an aggressive shot of British vocables, and when midnight, or later, found us under the watchmaker's roof the old man lifted his hands in horrified astonishment at our staying abroad so late. It was another evidence of English eccentricity.

When I bade Jeanne good-bye at the station, I with difficulty prevailed upon her to name a sum at least for my excellent board, if not for the pretty bedroom I had used for three delightful days. Judge of my amazement when at length she said, to put me at ease, and quite reluctantly, that she would accept three francs for my three days' board. This I regarded as so ludicrous that I laughingly told her I would rather discharge my debt from Paris, for I preferred to be remembered by a present than take out of my purse three miserable francs in return for all I had enjoyed. I declare there were tears in the child's eyes, and she sorrowfully assured me her holiday was

over. She had never had such a time at Angoulême since her birth : rows on the river by sunset and moonlight, she steering, I rowing, and all the boatmen looking on and cheering lustily ; walks here, drives there, and Tom, the glorious Tom, in honour of my nationality, permitted to walk with her, free beneath the free heavens.

I saw many artisans at Jeanne's, and never in one of either sex a hint of grossness, of boorishness, of stupidity. Jeanne, I admit, was the pearl of her set, speaking with polished diction, of manners gentle and urbane, only a nurse, and yet a perfect lady in everything. Her bedroom denoted her own charming refinement, with its blue and white curtains, its spotless prettiness, the flower vases, and little bookcase not ignobly filled. She spoke continuously of herself, of her wishes and dreams. Well, never once did I get a suspicion of a flirtation in her life. She spoke of men with dignity and simplicity, without simper or giggle, and made no effort to lead me to believe that she was pursued by lovers. When she referred to the shoemaker's addresses, it was simply to express her judicious fear of the immense responsibility of the post of step-mother. Her dreams were not sordid or vulgar. She wanted more liberty as a young girl, freedom to walk about with Tom, and not be hampered with so many unwise and unwritten laws. For the rest, she seemed content with the

modest place she had in the world ;' and I have known many a wealthier woman who might with reason have envied this bright little French nurse,—an honour to her country, her sphere, and her sex. I have seldom parted with a road-side friend with keener regret.

My next friend of the working class, and she, I am proud to say, is a friend of several years' standing, is my Parisian washerwoman. But here, I am bound to confess, I am fronted with an exceptional character,—witty, brilliant, of a liberal and bountiful nature, and original almost to the point of genius. My washerwoman comes every Tuesday, and brings gaiety and delightful wit along with her. She is all sorts of odd things together : a fierce Nationalist, a hard politician, a violent atheist, a hater of Jesuits and freemasons, inclined to Protestantism, if, unfortunately, the English were not Protestants already ; intelligent enough not to have been dazzled by the Russian alliance, even when all France went mad on the Czar's visit. "He wants our money, mademoiselle," she said to me in those mad times, "and we are fools enough to believe in his friendship." Whenever you mention the Russian alliance to her, she promptly asks who has seen that alliance written out on paper, stamped, and signed. And at the time of the Dreyfus Affair she could tell me to a centime the sum the Jews and the English had

paid the Czar, the Pope, and the Emperor of Germany. I was used to an excellent, witty, and extravagant lecture on the intricacies of the Affair every Tuesday which delighted me, as she always had some ineffable monstrosity on the part of the Jews, the English, the Germans, or the crowned heads of Europe to impart ; and took my joking with such delicious good humour that I did not know how to fill up the gap after the verdict of Rennes, for she is a very seemingly, dignified little woman, my Parisian washerwoman. She stands upon her manners, and says nothing more than "Good morning, mademoiselle," if you give her eloquence no opening. And what an eloquence it is ! What a flow of admirably chosen words, so expressively enunciated, with fitting gesticulations and the most wonderful grimaces of the wittiest and ugliest face I have ever seen ! Then came the Transvaal War, and here she shone. Indeed, I have repeatedly begged her to abandon the obscure calling of a washerwoman, and betake herself to public speaking. I have never known a woman more astonishingly fitted for the part.

With her, too, as with the peasant, the distinctive characteristic is an indomitable spirit of independence. I have never seen her anything else but gay and charming, but two Englishwomen to whom I recommended her complained of her insolence, because, being the soul of

honesty and an excellent washerwoman, she will stand no "observations" either about her washing or her prices; nor will she tolerate anything like airs. She maintains that she is quite as good as the Czarina, quite as useful, and probably more intelligent, as, if they changed places, she is convinced she would make a better hand at sitting on the throne than the Czarina would make with her washtub. The Englishwoman, I suppose, made some remarks that wounded this susceptible pride, and the fiery little washerwoman neatly tied up her bundle of soiled linen, and with a magnificent and haughty gesture laid it at her feet. "Madame can wash her own linen or look elsewhere for a laundress; I decline madame's custom," and walked out. The race have an eye, an unerring instinct, for the drama, and know how to render even the rejection of soiled linen picturesque and effective. They will cheerfully wash your linen for you and black your boots; but, as well as payment in coin, they demand that you shall recognise their right to consideration and courtesy as human beings. With the *ancien régime*, servility was swept away, and when your boots are blacked you are expected to give thanks for the service instead of lifting the toe of contempt in your servant's direction. A Scottish woman who married a Frenchman used to convey her opinions and wishes to her

servants by means of a horsewhip, and, though some years dead, is still a legend in Paris for her domestic difficulties and interior wars. She belonged to the earlier period, now happily ended, when a kick was administered for a pair of clean boots, and servants were supposed to swallow strong language with a grin. Slave-driving, too, is restricted here, for I have never caught a glimpse of the poor London "slavey," overworked almost to disease and insanity. This may be due to the system of flats, which saves labour, and does away with the necessity for carrying cans of water up several flights of stairs, but I am inclined to think that French character goes for much in the suppression.

Domestic service is despised by the average peasant, the girls looking forward to marriage, the men to peasant proprietorship, which works so admirably in France. And in many provinces very young children of both sexes go out as servants. At the different houses and châteaux I visited in the Saintonge it was always little girls and boys between seven and ten who served at table, answered bells, and helped in the house-cleaning. I cannot say I found the houses particularly clean, which may be a consequence, but it was interesting and amusing to see a tiny lad enveloped in a blue working bib sweeping the stairs, and little creatures at

table removing the plates with not an excessive clatter. One of the good results of this infant service was the indulgent and maternal attitude of master and mistress. Such wee, willing creatures could not be scolded seriously when they broke plates or glasses, and you could not take in their regard the high, impersonal air of England, where servants are mere instruments, not accepted as flesh-and-blood humanity. Here you must, if human yourself, smile and thank and pat a curly head or diminutive shoulder as the quaint creature offers you a course, with, oh ! such a stern determination to hold it steady and not accomplish disaster in the neighbourhood of your garments.

The standard of comfort, especially in the matter of sanitary appliances, has in France made an enormous progress during the last ten years. Ten years ago in the country even the better classes were little, if at all, in advance of Spain. I have seen such things in châteaux as would not bear description, and could not be credited except upon personal experience. So I ask myself what must be the state of peasant homes and of artisans' dwellings. With, however, the advance in schooling, comes an appreciation of domestic improvements, and the kitchen is rapidly ceasing to be the best bedroom. Under the Third Republic, so much maligned, public schools for peasant girls have increased,

which are considerably an advance on the old convent system of education. Nuns are the worst teachers in the world and the least conscientious. We have the exposure by the Archbishop of Nancy of the method of the nuns of the Bon Pasteur, who train orphans, and instead of teaching them, merely exploit them, and keep up a flourishing institution on the hard labour of children and girls, and, when the time for leaving the convent arrives, cast them out without an outfit or a farthing of all the immense sums they have earned for the convent when they ought to have been learning lessons. Of course, these republican schools are thwarted and vexed by every kind of petty persecution on the part of the clerical party. The French Catholics detest the lay teachers, whom they regard as the rivals of the Christian Brothers and the nuns, and make them suffer accordingly. Their writers of predilection make a point of holding them up for public scorn and ridicule, and so M. Henri Lavedan shows us, in that detestable play, *Le Vieux Marcheur*, a country teacher, Mademoiselle Léontine Falempin, all that she ought not to be ; and M. de Vogüé, to be true to the modern traditions of the French aristocrat, when he makes the base heroine of his dull novel, *Les Morts qui Parlent*, go wrong, jeeringly says, "So acted the pupil of the good M. Pécaut." M. Pécaut, a respected and popular citizen who died lately,

established an excellent lay institution for girls at Fontenay-aux-Roses, and M. de Vogüé's cowardly attack upon a dead man of whom the world knew nothing but good, by implying that a woman is impure because she has been brought up in his college, aroused the just indignation of every fair-minded Frenchman. If the theme were not too unsavoury M. de Vogüé would deserve that I should retort by revealing the tales of scandal and vice I have learned of a fashionable convent near Paris,—and these stories do not reach me from outsiders, but from four women who were educated therein.

It is a source of astonishment to me how inventive the French "little people" are in the matter of domestic stores. In Ireland, certainly, you will see nothing like it, but perhaps it may be different in England. Here all sorts of things are made at home: wines, spirits, liqueurs, and essences; jams, jellies, oil, vinegar, linen, bread, and honey. Everything in nature is turned to useful account, and the housewives are never idle. They have fruit and vegetables in abundance, and live, on the whole, well, if frugally. Their lands produce flax, hemp, cloves, colza, wheat, maize, every kind of flower, according to season and soil; and such is the elasticity of their temperament and their unsleeping industry, that they have been able to float above that tidal wave, the phyloxera, as great as any

of the Egyptian plagues, as they floated above the national disaster of "'70."

The hero of M. René Bazin's most charming novel *La Terre qui Meurt*, is a *métayer*; and *métayage* is land worked on the half-profit system, a midway position between labourer and freeholder. The sermon preached by this mournful little story is that the French land is dying for want of cultivation, as the peasants are swarming into the big towns, where they are not wanted, and leaving to waste the land that needs them. Each name in France is selected with a regard for the dignity of mankind. The cook and the barber call themselves "artists," and thereby efface any menial touch from their calling. The retired servant calls himself a *rentier*, and the retired labourer decks himself in the gentlemanly title of *cultivateur*. You may be a *cultivateur* with "lands and proud dwellings," like the earl in the song, or you may modestly cultivate a single acre.

With such a fine name in prospect, I wonder any peasant lad is lured from the country to the big, unsatisfactory towns, as M. Bazin laments in his tale of the *métayer* and his sons. In the *métairie* system the partnership between landlord and *métayer* is worked in this wise. The landlord supplies stock, land, and implements; the *métayer* brings the labour, and the profits are equally divided. The *métayer* boards his labour-

ers, and their wages vary, according to season, from seventy-five centimes to two and a half francs per day. The agent, on this system, is done away with, and the landlord and his partner stand as man to man. The artisan, too, in the country enjoys a pleasant independence. He builds his own house, he makes and maintains his own home with thrift and ambition. The standard of honesty is high. There is little beggary or drunkenness, and early marriages are frequent.

Of course the peasant is grasping,—it were idle to hide this, even in praising his frugality. He is close-fisted and hard-headed, and would rather part with his blood than with a franc ; but he and his brother, the artisan, have made, and help to keep, France where she is. However deplorable the pictures of their land which French novelists and story-tellers may offer us, we may believe, without fear of error, that it is not *La Terre* which represents the French peasantry, so human and so lovable, despite its lack of disinterestedness and generosity ; and it is not M. Octave Mirbeau's appalling heroine who represents the great hard-working, honest, and intelligent artisan class. Both of them have qualities above and beyond any to be looked for in the same classes elsewhere ; and if there were nothing else to admire, surely we must find admirable their rectitude and their love of independence.



CHAPTER IX

THE PRESS AND THE PEOPLE'S COLLEGES

THE French bring an artistic instinct into the manufacturing of all things, and so it follows that they could not be content to compose newspapers on the lines of British journalism, which accepts the propagation of mere news as the aim and object for which journalism was instituted. It is not necessarily what is true, but what will amuse and please his subscribers that the editor thinks of. If these want fiction, then give them fiction, by all means, but mix it up in a literary ragout. And so, when you have turned from the political article of your paper, which is frequently written in questionable taste, you will find little paragraphs, half-columns about the nothings of the hour, written with a delicate wit, an infinite grace and humour. Most of the contributors to the *Figaro* are remarkable writers. Of M. Anatole France there is nothing to be said here, once we salute him as the living master of French literature. Every Wednesday he offers the fortunate readers of the *Figaro* a

scene of contemporary history which constitutes a morning delight. This front column is reserved for the elect. Since the split in the French nation over an unhappy Jewish officer, many of the old contributors have been replaced by writers more in accord with the present line of the *Figaro* in politics. M. Cornély, the practical editor to-day, used to be a frantic Monarchist, the pillar of the *Gaulois*. Now the Government has no more firm upholder than this Conservative Catholic. His brilliant leaderettes each morning in the *Figaro* are a daily joy, so full of sense, of logic, of humour, and of wit are they.

Then the brief and delicious dialogues of M. Capus, who would miss them? To see the name of Capus to a half-column of dialogue on a topic of the hour is to be glad you have lived another day. It was by sheer imperturbable good-humour that the *Figaro* so splendidly fought the governmental campaign during the severe crisis it passed through after the verdict of Rennes, and out of which it came so triumphantly. Since the Revolution no French Government has had such an hour of triumph as that which the brave and excellent old man, M. Emile Loubet, and his brave and able Minister, M. Waldeck-Rousseau, enjoyed on the 22nd of September, 1899, at the unforgettable banquet of twenty-two thousand mayors of France, come from all parts of the country to gather enthusiast-

ically round the head of the State in a loyal protest against all the base and scandalous machinations of his enemies. It is not often one can congratulate a French editor on the political conduct of his paper, and M. Cornély deserves hearty congratulations for his skilful management of the governmental campaign in the columns of the *Figaro*. It is true he was magnificently supported by M. France, a host in himself, whose witching satires on Nationalism will remain among the most delicate and dainty of contributions to political literature of this or any country. It was a battle worthily won, the weapons, used with a surprising dexterity, being wit, charm, grace, and humour. The *Figaro* has also an old contributor, Le Passant, who out of nothing will fabricate you a half-hour of delicious hilarity, and for articles of a more serious and intellectual quality, the distinguished woman of letters who writes under the pseudonym of Arvède Barine.

Add to these intellectual features the bright interspersions of graceful little Parisian notes on anything, from a cabmen's or washerwomen's strike to the fraternity of European soldiers in China, from the weather to the circulation of false silver, the literary and theatrical chronicle at the end of such papers as the *Temps* and the *Débats*, always intrusted to writers of wide renown. For the criticism of books in Paris is

done by competent critics, who sign their articles, or is not done at all. Unsigned reviews in Paris are regarded merely as publishers' advertisements; and as well-known and responsible critics are few, it wisely follows that few books are ever seriously noticed. This is as it should be. If the London Press would adopt this manner, and suppress the daily trivial reviews of trivial books, less time would be wasted on mediocrities, and more time devoted to the few makers of literature. It is, thanks to this indifference to the large majority of incompetent and unoriginal scribblers in France, that here there are far less spurious reputations than across the Channel, where popularity and frantic eulogies in the columns of the newspapers seem to be based on the possession of no conceivable literary quality.

"We publish more than our own share of worthless trash," once said a French writer to me, "but it is always better written than your trash, for our bad writers must have some knowledge of grammar, which it appears yours lack, and they must write with what looks like a certain measure of style, whereas your bad writers shine by absence of the smallest pretension to style of any kind"; which means, of course, that illiterate French men and women know their language better than illiterate English men and women know theirs. They have been better

trained and disciplined in the maintenance of grammatical laws. And while English journalism would, I am confident, never descend into the gross personalities and insults of the low French Press,—that kind of journalism presided over by MM. Drumont of *La Libre Parole*, Millevoye of *La Patrie*, Judet of *Le Petit Journal*, and Rochefort of *L'Intransigeant*, the unspeakable *Intransigeant*,—more intellect, education, and style are expended in the columns of an ordinary French paper than would be needed to carry on a dozen successful London papers. No London journalist would think it worth his while to spend an entire morning over the “confection” of a bright leaderette, read to-day and forgotten to-morrow, or be content to cast real brilliance on the ambient air in the reckless fashion of the polished French journalist. The thousand exquisite things Daudet in this fashion flung into the bottomless abyss of journalism without a thought—Provençal spendthrift that he was!—that he was wasting his intellectual capital!

The *Temps*, a Protestant organ, is the most serious, the best informed, and the most respectable of Parisian newspapers. It has not the dash, the astonishing verve, the invincible courage of the *Figaro*, but it is always well written, moderate, and interesting. The dramatic and literary columns, are special features. The day

of the *Débats* is over. It once held the first place as an intellectual and political paper, but it has lost all vitality, and it has become that unacceptable thing in such an atmosphere as Paris, *démodé*. Few of its subscribers have remained faithful to it, and only one or two of its distinguished contributors.

The *Débats*, like the *Temps*, is eminently respectable, and never uses that recognised weapon of French journalism, calumny, which makes the loss of its prestige on political grounds to be deplored. For, in its method of fighting its political campaigns, the French Press to-day has descended to strange depths of dishevelled freedom. Under the Second Empire the Press had hardly more liberty than that which it enjoyed under the iron heel of Napoleon, and the supervision exercised by the censor in songs, plays, pamphlets, and literature was assuredly of greater benefit to the nation, even when making allowances for errors of judgment, than the coarse and outrageous licence permitted under the Third Republic. It was nothing but an act of stupid prudery to have taken proceedings against a grave masterpiece like *Madame Bovary*, but the Public Prosecutor, M. Bulot, should certainly have taken measures to summon before a court of justice M. Octave Mirbeau for writing such an irredeemable study as *Le Journal d'une Femme de Chambre*. The working-man, the artisan,

those whom the conditions of existence have excluded from the privileges of education, who can pay only a sou for their daily supply of political information, cannot be too deeply pitied for having to rely upon such sources of news as *La Patrie* and *L'Intransigeant*. They go into the wine-shop then, primed with the awful lesson in civilisation they daily receive, their minds poisoned against all those in public office by the ferocious hate, the slander, the ignoble lies they have read and discussed in their newspaper. How are these to distinguish between truth and falsehood? No critical faculties in them have been cultivated by training or education. They accept as educated the men who write these pernicious articles, and if the writers solemnly assure their readers that every public man in France is a thief and traitor, the latter suppose these men must know, and, being by nature suspicious of those who rule and tax them, they are only too ready to believe all they read. And so they credit M. Loubet with a capacity for every dark crime.

The unpretentious dignity and courage, above all, the *bourgeois* simplicity of M. Loubet's presidency of the Republic should bid us hope for France in our worst hour of despondency. There is a fine sense of duty in the race, for which this simple civilian stands without brag, assumption, or a trace of French *panache*. Honour

came to seek him uncourted, and he has not wavered or been bullied into resignation by the most appalling insults, outrages, calumnies, and actual assaults that have ever been showered on one mortal man. As a figure of civic integrity and of unassuming merit, I know none worthier of admiration in France to-day. For the terrible price paid in Paris for public office is not only abuse of person and principles, but the digging into every private corner of family history with a deliberate intent to injure and wound by attacks upon the dead. It is this extraordinary Nationalist Press that has so brutalised the imagination of the great reading public, that its readers do not even exact logic or a shadow of consistency from those who cater their politics for them. A little while ago two French officers killed their superior officer sent to arrest them on their way into the heart of Africa. Those two officers were then despatched by their own men, and the *Patrie Française* made a great splash in the way of a patriotic funeral for the assassinated colonel. Had the colonel been murdered by two civilians all would have been well. But the assassins were officers, and officers, when they are not Jews, must always be respected, admired, and adored. So when the patriots had done weeping over Colonel Klobb, since he had been interred with national and military honours, MM. Coppée and Lemaître, in

the name of the nation, acting as chief mourners, they decided to forget him and wax exceedingly and patriotically wroth over the fate of his glorious assassins. Why were Voulet and Chanoine killed? Who had dared to kill so sacred a thing as a French officer? It must be the Government, the wicked, infamous, Jew-paid Government. M. Loubet, of course, gave the order, and M. Waldeck-Rousseau transmitted it, and then, lest anyone should live to tell the tale, Waldeck-Rousseau wired instructions to kill off anyone else belonging to the mission. My Catholic friends are ever lamenting the lack of freedom under the Third Republic. I wonder if any Catholic Government has ever tolerated its enemies in the very heart of its rule writing daily in a hostile Press that it traffics in assassination. And nobody seems to find the charge in this case laughable. Nationalism is certainly in direct hostility to all sense of humour.

But France is too sound and honest and sober a race to live contented with no other public influence than that of her untrustworthy Press. The Catholics have always understood that religious ideas are most happily and lastingly spread by direct personal influences, hence the prestige of their clergy. Catholic clubs and societies abound, but the want of liberal education in the working-man was deeply felt in the revelations of the *Affaire*. To write of France

to-day is to hark back perpetually to the Dreyfus Affair. Everything seems to date from it, everything to touch it, everything to be explained by it. The misfortunes of no single man in all history have ever left such abiding and momentous consequences as those of the Alsatian Jewish officer, whose return to his native land all Europe stood still to watch with thrilled pulses. And so it was felt, as infamy after infamy practised against him was discovered, that the people should be educated to think for themselves, to know and understand what is being done in their name. It was felt, too, that they should have their share of the intellectual ideas, the moral and mental beauty that brightens life and gives it zest, hitherto appropriated by the rich and leisured classes. What M. Deherme calls the co-operation in idea, the basis of the people's colleges of Paris, is really the popularisation of culture. Anything is good that will help to keep the workmen out of the wineshops, where they are poisoned with inferior and inflammable alcohol, and guard them from the political garbage of their inferior and inflammable newspapers. If you cannot give the workman space, privacy, wealth, and luxurious home-life, at least make him free in his heritage of the thoughts that move the ages, put him in contact with the current of ideas in the ambient air. And so M. Deherme's

notion "caught on," and from it sprang the "Universités Populaires" opened in several of the populous working-quarters of the capital, where every evening, during certain periods, every different kind of distinguished citizen gives some of his leisure and some of his brains to the poor.

A subscription of fivepence a week, afterwards reduced to sevenpence halfpenny a month, from the numerous members was thought sufficient to pay for rent and light, while the rich should lend their pictures, give their books, and under the form of lectures impart their knowledge—this was the practical form of co-operation of ideas. Then it was decided that a doctor should have his free consultation-room, and working-men's families be able to come on Sundays and enjoy reading and plays or amusements of divers kinds. In winter, as well as books and papers, light was at their service, which was a small economy that balanced the small charge for these privileges. At its worst, it was always better and cheaper than the wineshop. M. Deherme hired a small lecture-room in the Rue Paul Bert, and for two years, even in the summer months of holiday, arranged for commercial lectures, debates, entertainments provided by the disinterested professional class — always the readiest to assist the poor. The wealthy sometimes give of their superfluous income — and

how little ! Contrast with it the much that doctors, lawyers, professors, men of science, give of their less as regards actual income ! When men like Zola and Léon Daudet sneer at surgeons and fashionable doctors, I ask myself if, for a moment, they realise all that these surgeons and doctors do for the needy for nothing. You give a subscription for some charitable object duly recorded in the newspapers. You have the benefit of your charitable reputation, and your self-advertisement ; you have earned both without any actual sacrifice.

How many doctors and surgeons have their hours set aside regularly for free consultations, and add to these gifts of money for medicine and wine ! If I were to try to enumerate all the kindnesses and liberal charities done by big doctors and surgeons, and by small doctors, and never a word of it recorded, I should have to embark in several volumes. I know no class of men so disinterested and generous, except perhaps, barristers and professors. In France we need seek no more splendid examples in this class of men than the present French Prime Minister, M. Waldeck-Rousseau, who gave up a lucrative profession, being the most brilliant and best paid advocate of France, to become an ill-paid Minister, sacrificing in the hour of a great national crisis something like fifteen thousand a year ; and Maître Labori, who, in order to defend an

unpopular cause, not only risked his life but fell from the height of professional wealth to something nearly approaching professional poverty. The Université Populaire, a liberal institution, with, in consequence, Church, Army, aristocracy and snobbish upper-middle class against it, was supported by such professors and writers, the glory of hard-working, thoughtful and intelligent France : M. Gabriel Séailles, philosopher ; M. Ferdinand Buisson, educationalist ; M. Emile Duclaux, director of the Pasteur Institute ; the Pasteur Wagner, M. Paul Desjardins ; M. Daniel Halévy, the brilliant young son of the illustrious writer, Ludovic Halévy, one of the simplest and most charming of Frenchmen it is my privilege to know ; M. Anatole France, whom I do not hesitate to call the greatest of living French writers ; M. Paul Hervieu, a kind of French George Meredith, with all the qualities and defects, the generosity and passion for justice of his great English brother, and others less known across the Channel.

Now the mother-house of the Université Populaire is in the Faubourg St. Antoine, the big nerve of labouring Paris. Here, in the heart of the Socialist movement, serious and honourable men strive nobly to combat the current of anarchy by fraternity in ideas and intellect with those who work by their hands and the sweat of their brow to keep France where she is, and

where she will ever remain as long as her children so strive, the centre of civilisation. The new building has a spacious lecture-hall, a museum, billiard-room, theatre, and library. The fame of its brilliant lectures has drawn such a large gathering from the centres of fashion and idleness that many a time the workman, the real "lord of the soil," has been turned away from his own door, having arrived late, when all the places were taken by the well-dressed usurpers from the boulevards and wealthy avenues.

Branch colleges have happily been established on the same lines at Montmartre, Grenelle, Belleville, the Boulevard Barbés, the Barrière d'Italie, the Rue Mouffetard, and, without the city wall, where the idea first started under the personal superintendence of its noble founder, M. Deherme, at Montreuil sous Bois. Alas, it cannot be said that the impetus that formed these admirable institutions has continued with the same force. Some of the people's colleges are temporarily closed, because the workmen have not shown ardour of late in attending them. It may only mean the defection that accompanies all strong reactions. Nobody but Don Quixote could for ever live and die at the fever-point of chivalry. Humanity traverses passionate crises, which reveal in a transient flash all that is best and worst in it, and then calms down to the

ordinary level of contentment, which has neither best nor worst, but which denotes merely the humdrum desire to live as easily as possible. The historical social crisis France has gone through has done this good, that a freer current was established between the intellectual and the manual workers of France, the guiding soul and hand of the race ; and though for the moment the great emotions which served as intermediary between them are forgotten, something of their union will remain. Neither the Church nor militarism, neither the worst influences of caste nor of the clerical party, can undo the good done by this late union. Let us hope the Université Populaire will pull up in the coming crisis of the Liberal Government, against which every base engine and infamy will be used, and that such an excellent institution as one which provides the teaching of the best intellects of France for the working-classes, libraries (from which are excluded any novels that respectable women and girls could not read), concerts, public reading-rooms well lighted and heated in winter, free consultations of brilliant lawyers and doctors on stated days, for the modest subscription of sevenpence halfpenny a month for an entire family, will not perish for want of general encouragement.

The French Liberals are making giant efforts to spread enlightenment, comfort, and fraternity

among their poorer brethren, and under the name of solidarity, are founding cheap restaurants, bath-houses, workmen's dwellings, and a nursing institute. Their efforts have inspired a Conservative rivalry, most excellent for the good of the country, as all rivalries are which strive for the improvement of the condition of the artisan class and the poor. The difference between them lies in the fact that the Catholic party is opposed to education. They wish to give as charity the Republic's offer as a right earned by labour.

There are two other influences at work upon the artisans of France ; one exclusively masculine, and the other an influence equally strong with each sex — the wineshop and the public ball. Statistics assure us that France leads the list for the consumption of alcohol — and statistics are weighty and respectable matter. But can it be true? one asks one's self in amazement, remembering the evil sights of London and the astonishing absence here of drunken men in the streets. Now and then you will meet such a thing as a drunken man, but the sight is unusual enough to attract notice. Tippling is the general form of drinking to excess here. The men go into the wineshop to have a drink, and to talk things over. There is always something to be talked about, and the public bar is the best place to have it out with your neigh-

bour, and the *marchand de vin*, sly rogue, is accused of supplying queer, unwholesome drinks that provoke thirst, so that one drink follows another.

The *marchand de vin* sells more than liquors. He is the local post-office keeper, sells stamps, postcards, tobacco, and usually has a rude little dining-saloon where workmen and coachmen gather. So it stands to reason that there is a great deal of coming and going, of movement and life; there is always something to be learnt in the way of rumour, and someone to listen to you in the hour of revolt. Thus many private and personal revolutions are planned here and it is decided here whether, on the occasion of public functions, the cry shall be, *Vive l'Armée* or *Vive la République*. As a different decision will probably be taken at the next wineshop, when these valiant heroes meet in the streets we are threatened with a renewal of the barricades. After the first or second shudder at these menaces, the citizens come to take them very quietly. I remember the afternoon the Chamber of Deputies met under the protection of the troops, when the whole large Place de la Concorde was laid out in bivouacs, mounted police and cavalry gathered in knots around groups of resting horses, both sides of the bridges guarded by lines of *sergeants de ville* through which a needle could not pass, except by wily and clever en-

treaties ; egress to the avenues, Rue de Rivoli, Rue Royale, all severely barred. You rubbed your eyes, and wondered if the city were besieged. Well, not a soul sought to cross the Place de la Concorde, except some curious, inoffensive spectator like myself. So quiet, so still and silent, was everything that it was impossible to account for all these regiments and this look of a besieged city. Visiting a friend who lives near the Pont des Invalides, she informed me that two young English girls had just left her in a state of acute disappointment. " We came to Paris to see the great French Revolution, and there was nothing." That has been the true state of affairs in Paris for the past two or three years. We were constantly sallying forth into the streets, and there never was anything much to be seen. What little there was in the way of civic uproar was centred round the reactionary and anti-semitic beershop Maxeville on the Boulevard. It rarely led to anything but a few arrests of a few hours' duration, and then we quieted down to await with fortitude and patience the next explosion.

The public ball is, if less revolutionary in its consequences, more morally disastrous. The French love dancing ; when they dance together in the open or in big kitchens, as the peasants dance, there is nothing for us to do but cheer and envy them. Here we recognise in the dancing of

tired workers a legitimate outlet for compressed activities, the eternal measure of joy which children of nature must ever tread. If it lead to love and marriage, or, maybe, only through the dalliance of flirtation, that, too, is in the fitness of things, since men and women must flirt, make love, marry or jilt; and the only thing we have to ask of humanity is that it shall do these things with decorum and taste. It is just this sense of decorum, of taste, which is so conspicuous in the French of all classes, and so absent in the British Isles. And the only place where this decorum and taste fail them is at the public ball. Here they literally go off their heads, and become vulgar, gross, and indecent. Modest little *grisettes* come to these vile rendezvous for the first time, well-mannered, timid, perhaps with some of the bloom of youth about them still, a reserve which might be interpreted as a kind of virtue,—such a pretty, engaging dignity does it give them,—and this they leave behind in the empty bowl of hot blue wine, with the slices of lemon or orange floating in it. They breathe the air of obscenity, and grow vain and audacious, believing this is life, and that they have learnt it. Inept and stupid rascals think it a grand thing to dye their souls in purple-black, and make a foolish mockery of all things sacred. Tenth-rate, vulgar-minded scribblers haunt these halls of horror, and pretend to prefer the popularity earned by their

brutish impurities, couched in coarse verse, in such abodes of vice to that of the reading public. And when, by chance, you see printed, or hear one of those hymns of Montmartre of the glories of Bullier or the Moulin Rouge, it seems to you a proof of infallible justice on the part of contemporary judgment that these mediocre scoundrels should have failed.

Yet the Parisian *grisette*, even when she is far from being a model of virtue, if she has not been vitiated by the *bal public* is a very well-behaved and gracious little creature. Her standard of life is not high, but such as it is, it is attained with surprising dignity, and it is thanks to the lover who leads her to the public ball, that she becomes acquainted with the ignoble, the profane, and the outrageous. Left to herself, she would ask for nothing better than a quiet and refined interior, a little money to spend capriciously, as many pretty, inoffensive fineries to wear as are necessary to make her always pleasant to be looked at, an occasional cheerful outing, with a picnic at Robinson or in the woods of Vincennes, or safe water-excursions at Bougival, with the certainty of replacing the present lover on the same discreet and advantageous lines. She takes no heed of the morrow, and it is this improvidence and the public ball that inevitably accomplish her ruin when she does not find — and it must be admitted she more frequently than

not does find—an honest workman willing to overlook her past and to start married life with her. Made for the stability of home, neat and competent, she soon settles down, and proves herself a good housewife.





CHAPTER X

THE PARISIAN LECTURE AND SALON

IN no city in the world is the public lecturer so popular as in Paris. The *Conférence* is almost a national institution, like the *salon* and the *foyer*. I will frankly confess that I find the average Parisian lecturer overrated, and the whole thing sadly overdone. In the winter and spring there are a great deal too many lectures, on too many subjects, but that is the way the Parisian, above all, Parisian woman, likes to take a dose of culture. When the season opens in January, you will generally find that your friends have subscribed somewhere or other for a course of lectures — six or twelve. Sometimes they take place in the lecture-hall of the Rue Caumartin, or in a lecture-hall in the Rue Boissy d'Anglas, or at the Société Géographique on the Boulevard St. Germain. Then there are the lectures of the Sorbonne, or the Collège de France, where the salaried professors of the State lecture, and a host of stray lectures

on every subject under the sun, in various private dwellings or hired rooms. In spite of the competition between the well-known French lecturers, professors, men of letters and of science, foreigners are given courteous hearing, and if they have anything novel and interesting to say, are heartily thanked as well as generously paid for saying it. This I know, for I have had the honour of giving several lectures in Paris on modern English literature, and had reason to congratulate myself on my sympathetic and appreciative audience of intelligent and cultivated Frenchwomen. They dress so well, these pleasant-looking Frenchwomen, and listen with such speaking, sparkling visages, that no wonder there is so much competition between the male lecturers. Even a morose man of science, when he casts his eye over his audience, must be gladdened and freshened by their presence. He may prefer communion with the masculine intellect ; but he must find his countrywoman's alert and agreeable face, under its ever-becoming bonnet, a welcome vision.

Distinguished foreign writers, if they know enough French, are generally invited to lecture by some society. Fogazzarro was asked to lecture here on his recent visit, and a very pleasant little lecture it was, delivered in the best and easiest manner possible ; and after him came Madame Pardo Bazán, the Spanish writer, with

a few commonplaces about Spain. The fashionable resort for the lecture fanatic has been, for some years past, the Bodinière, in the Rue St. Lazare. This is an old theatre, a concert hall, a kind of fast musical chamber, where ballets, songs, and lectures all mingle strangely, and the lecturer, when the curtain rises, is revealed seated before a table, with ballet-girls heel-and-toe-tipped on the walls around him. The first time I attended a fashionable lecture at the Bodinière, it was to hear the Abbé Charbonnel talk to us on Lamennais. I am not easily shocked, but I found both incongruous and indecorous the picture made by an abbé in his uniform of religion, between two ballet-girls, with images everywhere of public dance and light morals. The lecture was an impressive one, far above the average Parisian lecture, eloquent, original, solemnly grave, polished as only a Frenchman's prose is polished, with a note of burning revolt running through it. This, too, surprised me. When all London gathered to hear why an eminent clergyman of the Church of England left the faith of his fathers, they congregated in a church, and listened with a sense of solemnity to a solemn avowal. Here was a French abbé talking to us with a just indignation of the tyranny of Rome ; talking with passion and admiration of Lamennais's revolt and the injustice of Rome, talking as only a man

who felt and shared the moral sufferings of his hero could talk. It was undoubtedly beautiful and thrilling. It was like hearing a heart beat, like watching a brain throb, feeling one's self face to face with a naked soul in one of its great crises. But was a fashionable lecture-hall the place for such a public confession? Were frivolous, fluttering women of society a fitting audience in such an hour? Were these ladies of the ballet painted on the walls, this theatrical curtain, seemly environment? And was it in his abbé's robe that Victor Charbonnel should have denounced the tyranny of Rome in public? Shortly afterwards the Abbé Charbonnel was excommunicated, which was no more than everybody expected; and though there was not a word he uttered in that remarkable lecture on a remarkable subject with which I did not sympathise, I should have preferred to hear it delivered elsewhere,—in other and more solemn surroundings.

There is one thing that I have always noticed in the Parisian lecturer,—his complete lack of timidity, of want of self-confidence. However dull he may be, however mediocre, however uneloquent,—and he is often one, or all three,—no matter, he is sure of himself. He has chosen to shine as a lecturer, and as a lecturer he will under no circumstance be induced to recognise himself as a failure. This stupendous

self-conceit is a masculine characteristic, I know, but the Parisian lecturer carries it off with art. He is an artist in his genius for believing in himself. How many great men have I gone forth to hear talk of their art or of themselves, and come away amazed by the string of admirably delivered commonplaces they have uttered !

M. Gustave Larroumet is a lecturer all Paris was wild about some years ago. I was told that for love or money you could not get a place at one of his lectures, unless you subscribed beforehand for the whole course, and even then that he was bombarded with declarations, like a popular tenor, and that young girls died of undeclared love for him. Never was such a popular lecturer as M. Larroumet ! I went in dread and awe. Should I, too, succumb, and add one more to the daily thousand and one declarations of a hopeless passion ? The vast hall was thronged, the dresses were exquisite, the bonnets dazzling. All the young girls of fashionable Paris were there, with note-books and scented pocket-handkerchiefs for the expected great emotions. He came, the popular lecturer, and never was I more grievously disillusioned. He spoke well, his gesticulation and enunciation were equally delightful to hear and behold. He was, what one might expect him to be after such a course of public worship, the *blasé* fine gentleman of

the lecture-hall, good-looking, youngish, the very tenor of lecturers. But to what hopeless mediocrities he treated us, what *lieux-communs* he imperturbably walked us through ! It was one of Gresset's plays he analysed. The gist of it all was that our grandmothers were better bred than we are, because they indulged in *persiflage* and we in *blagues*. And this was the great lecturer of the hour !

Everybody knows the initial story of the French *salon*, and the fortunate influence on manners and literature of the prestige of the Hôtel de Rambouillet ; Molière, who laughed at everything, even at his own desperate sufferings, laughed at it in his *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, for nothing on earth is sacred to a Frenchman. Whatever his name, in whatever century he was born, he must, in consistency with his nationality, prove himself a scoffer ; and as he has the art of mocking admirably, it is always very difficult to know when he is serious or when he is laughing in his sleeve. A Frenchman will work night and day with frenzy for a purpose dearer to him than anything on earth, and all the while will deliberately make a mockery of his labour and his devotion. Writing to me on this subject, the eternal passion of the French for *blagues* (my correspondent defines in lucid English the word *blaguer*, "To say about somebody or something one admires or respects, jokes of which one does

not believe the first word," and I leave the definition with its pleasing French savour of composition and sentiment), a Frenchman says : "There is not a man in the whole of France about whom we have more joked than about M. Brisson, the ancient minister, the only political man to whom nothing could ever be reproached, but the epithet 'austere' deprived him of three-fourths of his authority, though Frenchmen are, after all, as sensible as other people to the virtue of honesty." And so may be said of Molière. He was as well aware as anyone could be of the immense benefit to his race and to his language of the establishment of the *salon*, even when he laughed at it.

Though the century of the *salon* has passed away, and carried along with it some of the glory of French literature, some of its traditions still linger, and will never be lost as long as the race delights in good conversation. English people visit to kill time, to fulfil a social obligation, and consider that their duty to themselves and their neighbours is done if they happen to remark that it is a fine day. Now, the French visit to talk. A pretty and well-dressed woman will, perhaps, have other more private and personal preoccupations, and wish to distract masculine attention to an adorable gown or a bewitching bonnet ; this was one of the reasons why that model keeper of a *salon*, Madame Geoffrin, excluded women from

hers. She found they interfered with serious conversation. I advisedly call Madame Geoffrin the "keeper" of a *salon*, because she made a business of it, and ruled and tamed her literary menagerie by a discreet and liberal use of her purse. I have often wondered if her great men in their hearts did not sometimes revolt against the thraldom in which they lived from the moment they became celebrated. To be bound to be brilliant and witty, in return for a good dinner and a consideration every evening of one's life! And to be condemned to meet none but brilliant and witty persons, and listen to their splendid talk when not talking splendidly oneself! There is matter for reflection here to make dull and obscure persons occasionally thank their stars. If good talk is not spontaneous, I own it has no charm for me, but then I have never aspired to hold a *salon*, and if you hold a *salon* and wish it to be a success, talk cannot be spontaneous.

Quite recently Madame Aubernon died, and Paris lost a literary *salon*, modelled, at a long distance, on that of Madame Geoffrin. Madame Aubernon was a rich *bourgeoise*, with no pretensions on the score of age, good looks, or dress. Her only ambition was to form a menagerie of celebrities. She gave them every evening dinners by no means as good as those of Madame Geoffrin, and checked, controlled, made them march

to her liking. She, too, professed mistrust of pretty women, whom she invited only to lunches and teas and such entertainments, because she feared that their pretty frocks, their arms and shoulders, would divert the attention of her great men from their duty to her and her *salon*. She kept a little bell beside her, and only allowed the great men to talk in turn. "Now, M. Renan," and Renan poured forth to order. "If you please, M. Dumas," and behold M. Dumas acquitting himself with docility and force. The famous story of the *petits pois* is told of every distinguished guest of Madame Aubernon. Sometimes you hear it with Dumas's name, or Renan's, or Pailleron's. It does not matter, but the incident remains a delightful illustration of the inconveniences of eating your dinner on the understanding that you are to pay for it in wit. The great man opened his lips out of turn, when the hostess stormily rang the bell, and ordered him to shut them again. Somebody else was speaking with permission. When he ceased, Madame Aubernon turned graciously to her tame lion, and said: "Now you may speak. What was it you wanted to say?" "Oh, nothing, madame. I only wanted to ask for another helping of peas." Musical celebrities are not so easily trained. When, after dining at some Parisian countess's, Chopin was asked to play, he quietly retorted: *Madame, j'ai si peu mangé*. But if

the great men of letters had been such bears as Chopin there would never have been the *salon*, and the story of Parisian life would be the poorer. And, after all, it is an excellent discipline. Men acquire the art of listening as well as that of talking, and it is a virtue of national importance to teach people not to be dull. For if you are dull you have no possible place in a salon. Your hostess has no desire to crowd her rooms with inanimate or bored figure-heads. You come on a distinct treaty, the conditions of which are accepted by your appearance,—to amuse and be amused. If you speak, either you must have something to say, or you must say whatever you wish to utter well.

Since the Faubourg has been sulking, and the aristocracy is no longer a power in the land, the aristocratic *salon* has dwindled into a tradition. The young men are so desperately taken up with sport, with automobiles, that they have not the leisure their elders had for the arts and graces of life. The *rosse* literature has spoiled the traditions of the Faubourg for us. The French aristocracy has come to mean Gyp and Lavedan for us, and a course of those writers may be warranted to drive any intelligent reader into the society of washerwomen and tramps as a pleasing change. The absence from all these heraldic pages, in which everybody is more or less titled, of such a thing as

a gentleman, or even an ordinarily honest man, is what stupefies me. What their admirers can imagine would be the benefit to France in upsetting the Republic in order to place in power a party, upon its own testimony, so scantily furnished with brains or honour, is what I am unable to grasp. And if their women-folk had their way, we should have back the "White Terror," and science and liberal thought would receive an emphatic blow. But happily there is no immediate fear of their triumph. The Duc d'Aumale and the Prince de Joinville took with them to the grave all the prestige that was left the House of France, and not even his followers take the Duke of Orleans seriously.

Political intrigue is, of course, worked in the *salon*, as Academy elections are helped. The Frenchwoman's influence is too great not to find an opening in every question of the hour. If she has no vote, she inhabits a land where the sorcery of her sex exercises a wider and deeper, a more permanent power than any political rights could ever give her, though, for many reasons, I am inclined to believe that it would be better for her and for her race if the significance of this power were other than it is. In a country where the courtesan plays a triumphant part, where newspapers solemnly recount her doings, describe her toilettes at Longchamps, at Auteuil, and interview her, we can scarcely expect

women not to misuse their sovereignty. They know that the day it bores them to be chaste, they need not cloak sin in the mantle of night. They may wear their lovers on their sleeves in broad daylight, and lose not a pennyweight of consideration. The *salon* of the woman who is known to have had (or to have) sentimental adventures will be thronged, and people will only smile and say of her that she "distracts" herself. I remember hearing an extraordinary story once of a beautiful woman, the admired and courted holder of a famous *salon*. The cousin of the friend who told me the story fell a victim to her charms, and was staying with his mother at some Mediterranean resort, when he learnt of the siren's arrival at a neighbouring town. He forsook his mother to rush after her, and remained with her during the greater part of the long summer vacation. When their holiday had drawn to a close, the lady took the train, and called on her lover's mother, and in the highest *ancien régime* manner, said : "Madame, I come to return your dear son to you." His little *fugue*, she said, was at an end. The two ladies parted on the best of terms, the one to welcome back the erring sheep (not that a French mother regards her son under these circumstances as an erring sheep), and the other to open the doors of her closed *salon* in Paris to all the notabilities she had left sighing for her brilliant and hospitable

roof. What will you? When a woman is not his own wife, a Parisian does not put any price upon her honour. True, he makes up for this laxity in regard to his neighbour's wife by arrogating to himself the right to murder his own faithless wife with impunity. By this legal ferocity he buys back the privilege of considering himself at times a model of Roman virtue.

The *salon* is all very well, so are the songs of Montmartre, the Théâtre Rosse, but there is just one little point, a solitary point, on which the Frenchman is in no mood to *blaguer*, not being Molière, and that is *his* wife's fidelity to the marriage vow, which vow, if we are to believe him (I confess I do not) he spends his own life in breaking. He laughs at most other things, but here he displays a desperate and unhumorous gravity. The law considerably assists him, by telling him that killing is no murder. But if he does n't laugh, his neighbours round him laugh joyously for him. The infidelity of another man's wife is the best of all jokes in France, and public sympathy always goes with the wife.

And yet, while laughing at himself, and at all things round him, the Frenchman offers us the ideal of an indefatigable worker in whatever road he has elected to run his career. If he can talk well, he can work hard, and no race seeks so strenuously as his to achieve perfection in



GLEANERS

J. A. Britton

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every path. The alacrity and precision of his speech he brings into all he does, and I know no men who have won renown able to wear it so simply, with such a delightful absence of pompousness, as distinguished Frenchmen. Victor Hugo was, of course, the big exception indispensable for the proof of the rule, for Victor Hugo sat in pontifical state on his Throne of Letters, and posed as a sort of Napoleon. But that was a part of his flamboyant genius, which had to make a life apart for itself. Renan, with his delicate scepticism, his good-humoured tolerance, was a much more convincing figure of French genius ; he was more in keeping with the urbane, gentle traditions of his race. The French language lends itself to such a daily dignity of existence, that this may partly be the reason there always seems to me something peculiarly and indescribably harmonious about intimate life in France, as well as in its larger social phases. Everybody about you, beginning with your servant, speaks so well, that long intercourse with them unfits you for latitudes where speech is less admirable and less choice.





CHAPTER XI

THE "LITTLE PEOPLE" OF PARIS

THE "little people" of Paris are not confined to any particular quarter of the city. They are to be found everywhere, in spacious avenues, in streets of heraldic renown, in the sinister neighbourhood of La Roquette, through the noisy length of St. Denis. Opposite the palace of the Duke of La Rochefoucauld in the Rue de Varennes will you see an old curiosity shop, and close by work a mild-eyed cobbler and his wife, a little sempstress. Excellent types, both of these indefatigable little people of Paris, living in two tidy attics of this aristocratic street, with an air of quiet independence. The little people are of all sorts : beginning with the "little" *bourgeoise* and ending with the rag-picker and the *marchand de quatre saisons*. The little *bourgeoise* is a curious study, and to penetrate into the precincts where she breathes and thrives, the foreigner must be her boarder. Else will he obtain none but a superficial view of her ; and

as her aspect is generally cheerful, her manners pleasing, he will be disposed to think better of her than she altogether deserves. The thrift of the little *bourgeoise* must be given its real and ugly name, avarice, for it is nothing else. It has turned its back upon the virtue of economy, and has assumed the coarseness of a vice. And so when she furnishes a spare room, it is that she shall exploit mercilessly the stranger at her gates. The traveller in search of experience may drop in upon her, but those not supplied with patience, with fortitude in the endurance of cynical imposition and lucre to meet complacently exorbitant demands upon their purse, should avoid this interesting creature, and go to a hotel. In the first place, the opening of private doors to the traveller or over-seas student is so foreign to the habits and instincts of her race, that once she has allowed the brilliant idea of "taking in" a foreign boarder to enter her narrow mind, she starts immediately by magnifying her legitimate profits, and in her ardour to amass francs on ground where she is practically free from all commercial or professional restrictions, she is not beset by any paltry fear of overstepping the limits of honesty. Her sole conception of that homely virtue lies in its rigid application in her own regard, in an austere resolution to see that nobody on earth shall cheat her of the value of a single farthing. I know

not which is the more astounding : her inflexible insistence on the honesty of her *bonne*, or the flexibility of her conscience when she comes in contact with alien claims upon her own honesty.

Her favourite boarder is the young American or English art student. Young women she naturally prefers, because it is easier to fleece them, and they are shy of monetary disputes than men or experienced women. She will not scruple to demand for the poorest table imaginable and the perfunctory service of a single maid-of-all-work, the terms of a first-rate *pension* or a comfortable hotel, where there are servants in plenty and the table is varied and excellent. Her excuse is that, not being a boarding-house keeper or a hotel keeper ("Would that she were either!" dejectedly moan her victims), she is entitled to relatively higher prices for the privilege of a seat at a private table. In the region of bills she is altogether her own mistress, for she has no commercial reputation at stake to balance her notions on the subject of profits, which are colossal, and so she enters every extra she can think of with gaiety of heart, and a smiling conviction that all is fair that puts cash into the big pocket of the rapacious little *bourgeoise*. Not that she will risk frightening off a possible boarder by a revelation of this view beforehand, and no mention of those formidable

The "Little People" of Paris 267

trifles called "extras" will be made in the preliminary treaty. Then it will be all beguilement and blandishment, allurements and promise, with a hint of paradise through the open door of her modest establishment. Within there, seems to say this cheering creature, will you find the warmth of home, maternal care and tenderness when you are ill, and intelligent sympathy in all hours. Ten pounds a month seems a small sum to pay for this, and you enter gratefully, not disposed to criticise, on the contrary, eager to see everything through the rose hue of satisfaction, to find another fifty or seventy francs added to your bill at the end of the month for wine, light, coffee, service, linen, and baths. When fire comes to be included, you discover that you might have boarded, with comfort, independence, and good living, for the same price in one of the hotels of the Rue de Rivoli. For independence is the very last thing the little *bourgeoise* is disposed to allow her "paying guest." It needs a quality of brain of which she is destitute, to recognise a single woman's right to liberty.

The foreign boarder's days under her roof constitute a march through surprises. Here no gleaming glass and shining damask at table; no flowers, no silver, no tasteful arrangement of desert; for tablecloth a coarse sheet and cloths to match for napkins, sometimes patched, and

invariably sewn down the middle. There is nothing to please the eye or the palate, but the disappointed boarder must stoically hold her tongue if she would maintain agreeable relations. The hostess is an arbitrary as well as a parsimonious and dishonest housekeeper. The exactions, the arrogance, must be allowed to remain all on her side and the malcontent has nothing to do but pay a month's board and lodging in advance and pack up her things. If she stays, a hushed civility is expected from her, and all payments rigidly in advance. Why, the little *bourgeoise* should have instituted this singular law, that a month's food should be paid for before it has been consumed, I have never been able to understand : but I confess I have never been able to master the complicated ethics of this interesting woman. She is a fervent Catholic, attends church regularly morning and evening, confesses, teaches Catholicism and morality to the outcast infant, and never seems to suspect that honesty is one of the virtues incorporated in the Christian doctrine. When she orders anything for you she will pay one price in the shop and charge you another ; yet, good, consistent creature, she goes to market on market days after Mass to take note of the prices, in order to calculate to a farthing what the day's purchases will cost, so that the *bonne* shall not cheat her of the value of a sou. This is hard on the *bonne*,

The "Little People" of Paris 269

whom she pays as little as she can, and under-feeds, and overworks, and who is thus defrauded of one of the acknowledged perquisites of the servant in France,—*le sou du franc*. When a Parisian servant makes a purchase over a franc, each tradesman returns her a sou on every franc paid in cash. The avid "little *bourgeoise*" usually insists on having this sou back, and if the *bonne* is meek and afraid she gives up the sou, for her mistress understands the question of perquisites only in her own right. She watches her servant closely, though there is nothing of a shrew or a Sally Brass about her. She victimises her through the attendant vice of avaricious, unsleeping suspicion. And so she visits the kitchen when the girl has left, to see if a lump of sugar or a piece of bread, or anything else, should be secreted anywhere. Perhaps once a week she will give the domestic martyr a half-dozen rotten strawberries or cherries when these can be had for next to nothing, or the last spoonful of rice or stewed prunes when the enraged boarders have turned their eyes from nauseous remains of these choice dishes three or four days old.

Her cuisine is a thing to gape at. You forget you are in France, the land of good, inexpensive living, and pronounce it frankly execrable. The dinner usually consists of vegetable water or greasy water with pieces of bread floating

about, of ragged *bouilli* (the meat used in the boiling of this insipid liquid), a tasteless dish of sorrel and of stewed prunes that will be served no less than four or five times successively until the very last of the dish has been consumed, or a dish of rice which will also in its half-finished condition make its successive appearance until the last grain has vanished, and the dish, presumably on the score of economy, on which these luxuries are served will not even be changed. In the same quaint spirit the remains of cold vegetables are reheated and served again, with such result for eye and palate as no pen can describe. Whatever you find at her table you may know beforehand will be of the worst and cheapest of its kind, and there will be as little as possible of it. When fruit outside, in the markets, along the streets in barrows, in the shops, is plentiful, excellent, and absurdly cheap, she will assure you it is far too expensive for her table, and treat three art students, each paying, exclusive of extras, ten pounds a month, to musty biscuits and dried figs that taste like caked sawdust. As for sweet dishes, creams, sauces, varieties of well-cooked vegetables, all the thousand little kickshaws we associate with the dainty French term *cuisine*, these you are as likely to find at her table as ice-cream or champagne.

The home life of the little *bourgeoise* is a

The "Little People" of Paris 271

strange and a dull one. She possesses a house, one wonders why, when a bedroom seems to be all that she requires. She lives in her bedroom as Englishwomen of the same class live in their parlours. That a *salon* was made for use, to be sat in and worked in and talked in, never enters her head. She uses her dining-room only for meals, and thus never has any fire in it during the winter, does not dream of lighting the stove which every French *salle à manger* has, however small. She puts on a shawl to go into lunch and dinner. The *salon* is hermetically sealed all the week, and opened gingerly should she have an at-home day; if not, it is opened only when some very important visitors call. I have known a little *bourgeoise*, whose "paying guest" I, for my misfortune, happened to be, who allowed the inmates of her establishment to pass into the *salon* after dinner for exactly an hour. At nine o'clock she rose and graciously dismissed us from the sacred precincts, bidding us disperse to our chambers, while she locked up the holy of holies. Here, as elsewhere, I discovered that such a thing as a comfortable chair or sofa is unknown, undreamed of by the little *bourgeoise*. To do her justice, she never lounges herself, and consequently does not understand the need. This is the admirable side of her character,—the complete absence of self-indulgence. She swindles you, not for her

comfort, but for the security of her old age. She is circumspect and formal in all her attitudes, absolutely self-respecting, of a cordial coldness, and there is something impersonal, something claustral in her selfishness. I have remarked that nuns resemble her astonishingly in all their material relations with the world : the same implacable hardness, the same smiling austerity, the same lack of honesty or of consideration for others, the same resolute determination to get the best of outsiders in the matter of labour or bargains, to give as little and obtain as much as possible in all transactions, to underfeed, underpay, and overwork,—and all with the same high air of self-approval and righteousness.

Religious communities will cheerfully, singing, as it were, hymns of thanks, do for the glory of God things modest pagans would shrink from in honour of the devil, and the little French *bourgeoise* has much of this inexplicable complacency in dishonesty. Like the nuns, she is active and virtuous, and she is most pleasant as long as you are pliant and uncomplaining,—the ideal art student ! But she is essentially a despot, the unyielding mistress of her own house ; and she is cynically indifferent to your dissatisfaction should you think fit to make it visible. She has no hesitation whatever in letting you understand, with a sincerity that does her honour, that she did not take you as a boarder

The "Little People" of Paris 273

with the naïve intention of rendering you comfortable or giving you an adequate return for your money, but with the simpler design of making a considerable profit on you. She will say to you, with that French independence I ever admire, that it is not your purse but hers that is in question ; and I judge her to regard as idiots such saints as Martin of Tours and Francis of Assisi. Truth is no more conspicuous than charity and honesty among her virtues, for she will lie with a courage befitting a nobler cause in the interests of her pocket. The minute and persevering genius of Balzac alone could follow her through the maze of economical twists she has devised wherewith to save or make a sou. She is impaled in my memory over her sugar-bowl like the king of nursery legend counting out his money. If avarice be an impediment to reception within the gates of Paradise I fear my arrogant, self-approving little friend has small chance in the next world. Yet far be it from me to deny her good qualities and her charm. She is so well-mannered, so pleasant, so intelligent, such a plausible villain when off the field of her illegitimate profits, that fain would I see her flourish and triumph. After all, money matters are not the sole test of virtue. I have known persons of the most unimpeachable honesty and delicacy on this ground, utterly insupportable in all things else, with horrid tempers

and tongues, an utter lack of heart, which is not the little *bourgeoise's* failing, for if you are ill she will overwhelm you with kindness and attentions, accompanied ever with her equable, smiling cordiality ; and if your bill is the heavier, well, at least you have had the pleasure of the attentions ; and her presence, when you are not considering its consequences in your bill, is more often than not a tonic and a ray of sympathy and gaiety. Of so priceless a quality is gaiety, that good-humoured roguery is better any day than sour, ill-natured honesty.

The small dressmaker is another pleasing picture of the humbler walks of Paris. The *grisette* I deem to be as extinct as the dodo, while the class of work-girl I have in view may be supposed to step out of her rank. But the novelist who would try to turn her into copy for Musset or Mürger would be all abroad. She earns her bread honestly and diligently in the skilful exercise of her art, with a band of juvenile needle-women round her who ought to be playing in the fields, but who, instead, are content to sit in a tiny workroom and sew and snip all day. Nothing more dignified, more modest, more self-respecting than all this young world, seemingly unaware of any reasons for dissatisfaction. The youthful mistress exercises her authority with good-humour and gentleness, and her willing little workers appear really fond of her. It is in

The "Little People" of Paris 275

Paris that I have become converted to Tolstoi's belief that the humble class is the *vrai grand monde*, a thousand times more interesting and instructive, worthier of our admiration, than the wealthy and educated classes. The deeper you penetrate into these obscure lives, the deeper you feel a sense of humiliation by confrontation with the futility of education, breeding, blood,—the accepted adjuncts of superiority. The poor and humble of the world are inarticulate, and they live and die unconscious of the heroism of their existence. But the average woman of the people gathers more virtue into a single day than the educated woman, who enjoys the priceless benefits of leisure, space, and ease, spreads over a week. Mark the gaiety and content with which she will toil for inadequate pay, rising early, resting late, with few pleasures, fewer distractions, maintaining through all her never-ending trials a dignity of bearing, an ideal of honesty, an incomparable altitude of disinterestedness that should shame us for the idle price we put upon birth and education. Let us pick out of the crowd one figure of the small dress-maker Dickens or Daudet might have made a charming study of. I have been observing her life now for some years with friendly interest, and have not found a flaw in it. She is good to look upon, a supple French figure, clear skin, pretty features, reddish soft eyes, and red hair a

painter would delight to paint. Young, too, with winning manners, she would not have far to look for assistance in her difficulties with term-day, work-girls, and other expenses. Her father, an invalid, and her mother live in a suburb, and she dwells alone all the week in a somewhat squalid flat near the Bon Marché, her own protector, and needing none other ; such is her indestructible purity. No well-born girl could show a more delicate reserve towards men than this pretty French dressmaker, no nun could reveal herself less of a flirt. Her sole desire is to please her customers and extend her connexion, to work early and late, sometimes into the small hours of the morning ; and her sole distraction, after a week's hard labour, is to go out to her parents in a dusty suburb beyond Sant-Ouen, from Saturday evening to Monday morning. She never grumbles, she is never unhappy ; and though I give her books and encourage her to talk to me about them, I have never detected in her remarks a particle of envy or discontent with her humble lot. Her mind is clear and fresh, essentially a lady's mind, and her notions on the score of honesty are as primitive as those of the poet who taught us in our infancy that it was a sin to steal a pin. Quite as good and graceful pictures may be drawn from the lower class of sempstresses who come to the house and work by the day.

The "Little People" of Paris 277

These, too, have their ideal of conduct, which owes nothing to education, and which a lady need not disown.

The *concierge* belongs to a more complex order of being. These often run down to desperate depths of degradation, and, in the wealthy quarters especially, constitute one of the curses of Parisian life. I suspect it is the tips and the endless sources of gossip that demoralise them. And yet I can remember a delightful old lady, who looked as if she had stepped out of a perfumed page of the last century, with her lovely white hair fluffy and soft under a black mantilla; tiny, elegant, wrinkled hands; gentle glance and exquisite smile, with the manners as well as the appearance of a French marquise. She was my *concierge*, and a sweeter, more disinterested little creature I have never known. I lived on the fifth floor, and had no servant, contenting myself with the services of a *femme de ménage* in the morning. I was seriously ill for months; and had this dear, gentle old lady been a relative or a friend she could not have nursed me more devotedly, and never a farthing in coin would she accept. She overwhelmed me with thousands of charming attentions, and the only payment she would take gratefully was the assurance that they gave me pleasure.

So, though I constantly hear terrible tales of the wicked doings of the Paris *concierge*, I have

to pass them over lightly for the sake of my white-haired little marquise. Whenever I want to show an English friend what an enchanting creature a Frenchwoman of the people can be, I make a point of passing through her street, for the pleasure of looking in on her, and saying, "Good-day" to my old friend. The *concierge*, should he or she happen to be disagreeable, can do a singular lot of mischief, and make the lodger's life a burden to him. If you are out, friends who call can be sent up several flights of stairs for nothing ; if you are in, your callers will be assured you are out. Letters can be held over, mislaid, or forgotten ; your servants can be set by the ears in the *concierge's* parlour ; evil reports can be spread of you in the neighbourhood ; hints given to trades-people against your solvency. All these things I have known to happen to persons in discordant relations with their *concierge* ; so that it is recognised in Paris that if the *concierge* does not like you, the best thing you can do is to pack up your things, pay a term in advance, and go.

The rag-picker of Paris is a familiar figure. To him belongs, I know not why, some of the glory of romance. Everybody feels a sneaking tenderness for the rag-picker. When, some years ago, M. Poubelle, the Prefect of Police, decided that the rubbish of Paris was no longer to be left outside along the pavements, but that

The "Little People" of Paris 279

each house should have its big refuse-box, called ever since by his name, there was a general uproar in the Press. What ! disturb the amiable customs of the interesting rag-picker ! Diminish the income of these delicious Parisians !

Little by little their favourite and most famous citadels have been demolished, their oddly named groups dispersed. There used to be the *Cité des Singes* and the *Cité des Mousquetaires*, now no longer in existence. The rag-pickers are everywhere, and live just like other citizens. I visited the rag-pickers of my quarter the other day. I found them in an airy quarter of Grenelle, like a quiet little town of the provinces on the edge of a wide river. Who would dream it was Paris, and that broad splash of dull grey, the lively brilliant Seine that flows past the Louvre ? When I reached the rag-picker's dwelling, she was out, and two neighbours from different doors appeared to assist me. If they had known me all their lives they could not have given me a more friendly greeting. One went off in search of the rag-picker, the other pressed me to take a seat in her room. The rag-picker came, one of the jolliest and pleasantest-looking women I ever saw. She spoke admirably, with perfect gesticulation, with inflection of voice, management of eyebrows that would have won her distinction in a *salon*. Her expressive face was clean, but her hands

were the hue of soot, and her hair 'was the grey of dust. Her little room, kitchen and sleeping-chamber, was freshly washed and in perfect order. Outside the window clothes hung drying, and below in the courtyard a pile of rubbish lay for sorting. It would be impossible to find anywhere a healthier-looking or a happier creature. Yet this has been her life from the age of twelve : she gets up at four A.M. winter and summer, hail or snow ; she heats some milk for her dog, boils coffee for herself and her husband, leaves coffee simmering for her three children, who, when she and her husband, with their cart and dog, have gone off on their rag-gathering mission, get up, dress, and go off to school. She paid fifty francs to her fellow-rag-pickers for the whole of the Avenue de Breteuil, which was then only half built upon, and to-day her practice is worth three hundred francs. I imagined the tax was paid to the town ; but no, it is paid to a sort of guild of rag-pickers, who thereby assure her and her husband that they only have the right to the refuse of the avenue. When they have picked up all the refuse, they return and sort it out in the yard. She told me the prices of each thing, and hair is the most valuable, — above all, white hair. The honesty of the Parisian rag-picker is proverbial, and I know something of it, for once a silver spoon of mine was accidentally flung out, and

The "Little People" of Paris 281

the next day the rag-picker brought it back to the *concierge*.

Her visage shone with a positive radiance of soul. Her cheerfulness was so contagious that it set me wishing to be a rag-picker too. Her devotion to her husband and her children, of whom she spoke in rapturous terms, was hardly more touching than her devotion to a saintly priest, who seems to do an immense deal of good in the neighbourhood.

This man is quite remarkable ; and a friend, speaking of him to me, and of his well-known enthusiasm for rag-pickers and their like, told me he once said to her : " See you, when once you get into the heart of that class, you can't endure any other. It becomes a passion." And I can well understand it, from all I have seen of the humbler classes of Paris. There is a fulness of life, of vitality, of inarticulate, unconscious goodness about them that puts you in sympathy with Tolstoïism. But instead of the mysticism, the intensity of the Russian character, you have here that irresistible French gaiety, which is not by any means so light as it is said to be. Action is its virtue. Its mental horizon is brightened by a personal charm of character, as a twilight sky is enriched by an arch of radiant colour. In spite of the false romancers, morality is in the air, everywhere about us.

In these humbler walks I refer to, pure girls,

faithful husbands, devoted wives, hard-working, honest sons and daughters abound, and the force, as well as the weakness of all may be found in the love of home and family. The temple of self-respect is lit with the unquenchable flames of independence. All these admirable "little people" work so hard and so contentedly that they may enjoy the delights of freedom and a hearth, and they work the more contentedly, without embittered or soured temper, because they have the inestimable art of living and enjoying themselves when they leave aside work. The lower down you go among the people, the greater the readiness to open the purse, and a workman bent on a holiday will not hesitate to pay twenty or thirty francs for a picnic carriage for the day, and fill the hamper with an abundance of good fare and drink. I remember once hearing a well-to-do woman violently complain because her coachman's brother-in-law had paid such a price for a vehicle to take a marriage party out into the country. I could not share her indignation, to her disgust. The French people work so hard, and so gallantly, and so well, that I think they earn their right to an outbreak now and then. They at least pay for their pleasures and dissipations with the sweat of their brow, and we who profit by their labour owe them all thanks and indulgence.



CHAPTER XII

ORGANISED PHILANTHROPY AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

IT would be difficult to say whether or no France compares favourably with England in the matter of philanthropy and the poor laws. But this much must be admitted in favour of the Republican Government,—charity was never so widely practised, was never so effectual or so free-handed, as it is to-day in France. You will hear the futile nobles and those who would pass for a part of the aristocracy by the mere virtue of adopting its vices and prejudices, assure you that everything was better under the *ancien régime*; that shopkeepers, peasants, farmers, and workmen were all better off when they depended upon an absolute king. French Catholics, like nearly all other Catholics I know, soar above argument, logic, the surprises, revelations, and irrefragable testimony of history. What they desire to have been, to have happened, must have been and happened, and there is nothing more to be said. And so to-day,

whenever a handful of titled malcontents out of office, followed by a train of wealthy and fashionable imitators, rail at a Government indifferent to their interests, it is solemnly maintained that the people groan and sweat under tyrannical laws, and that France has gone to the dogs. A statement more contrary to truth and fact could not possibly be made.

Without examining even the enormous efforts of private charity to improve the condition of the poor, we need only take up the subject of Public Assistance to assure ourselves that the incessant preoccupation, under republican rule, of the municipalities all over France is the amelioration of the lot of the unfortunate classes of humanity. If you lend an indulgent ear to the Catholics, they will assure you that the municipality of Paris, because hitherto it has been democratic and secular, is a mere gang of thieves, that the public funds are squandered on private ends, and that not a penny of its vast revenues finds its way into the pockets of the poor. This is simply a calumny — a stupid, groundless invention. The *Assistance Publique* has done more for the poor than all the kings of France put together. In the days of Louis XIV. there was no such thing as a public lying-in hospital. Wretched women, without a home, or means of any kind to obtain shelter for the birth of their children had to go to the Hôtel de

Ville, where they lay on the floors, and even two occupied each of the few beds, and child-birth took place in a state of indescribable filth and discomfort.

The calumniated *Assistance Publique* has built a large *maternité*, where mothers and infants receive all possible care ; and, in case of pressure on their space, they pay midwives, properly diplomaed, to take charge of poor women in their own houses. Everything at present is so comfortably organised in these public institutions that many women of small means prefer to avail themselves of them rather than endure the domestic upheaval of a confinement at home. It should, however, be admitted that the *Assistance Publique* took the idea from M. Pinard's charmingly situated *maternité* of the Boulevard Port Royal. M. Pinard is something more than a celebrated *accoucheur* ; he is a philanthropist, or, as his enthusiastic disciple, Dr. Franck Brentano, said of him when kindly doing me the honours of the *maternité* of the Boulevard Port Royal, he is a saint. He decided that his hospital should be cheerfully situated, and so it lies in lovely gardens, and, on every side, the patients have views of flowers and trees and green spaces between well-kept paths. Not a hospital this, surely, but an elegant old mansion, through whose long, open windows the fragrance and bloom of flowers carry joy to the

senses, while the song of birds makes perpetual music for the weary convalescents. Dr. Franck Brentano showed me the trim rose-beds with the proud intimation that it was M. Pinard who reared them exclusively for his invalids. From time to time he gathers them, and places a rose, moist with its early dew, beside a patient, bringing her, with such delicacy, the assurance that she is, for him, something more than a public patient. Not so were cherished unfortunate women under the *ancien régime*. We laugh at the official legend bequeathed France by the Revolution, and, of a surety, we are not justified in that laughter. If liberty, equality, and fraternity are not all that they might be in France to-day, there has been made a considerable step towards their accomplishment which the conscientious observer is forced to recognise. If brotherhood is still in a nebulous state, the same cannot be said of equality. Where, in London, will you find the head of a large hospital cultivating roses and gathering them at sunrise to carry a breath of delight to a worn-out woman of the people? Such a division and infrangible distance as exist between classes in England are here no longer known. The people are the better for it, and certainly society is not the worse. If republican independence has done nothing else for France, it deserves national gratitude for having abolished what flourishes so desperately in England,— the

painful whine of poverty, not ashamed to cringe, and the smirking curtsy and bob of the people, proud to acknowledge what they are pleased to call their betters.

I have heard a great deal of abuse of the lay nurses who replace the sisters now in public hospitals. All I can say is, that I was struck with the spirit of cordiality and exquisite humanity which seemed to emanate from everybody I encountered at M. Pinard's *maternité*. This, of course, may be due to the governing hand, for where so rare a nature as the chief commands the illimitable devotion and passionate admiration of his subordinates, it is but natural we should find an atmosphere of disinterestedness and good-will. That M. Pinard's delicate consideration for oppressed womanhood does not end or even begin in this well-ordered hospital is proven by the establishment of his admirable asylum close by. This is a home for friendless women awaiting their turn to be received into the hospital. Here they may come for two or three months, free to live and work as they like, to go to mass, to the temple or synagogue, or to no church whatever ; and, by sewing or some such light labour, to earn a little to put by for the day they leave the *maternité*. Surely this is the most practical of all forms of free philanthropy. No propaganda, no religious exclusiveness, no other preoccupation, but the wish to

persuade a despairing creature to live and give life under the best conditions of care and personal kindness. Yes ; let us frankly admit that the Revolution has not been in vain, in spite of its horrors, its inexplicable baseness, its acts of inconceivable cowardice. The men who made it were no heroes, and we can bear at this hour to call them remorselessly by their proper names. But the evil they did in the cause of humanity has finally led to the amelioration of their race. Lay France, with all her liberal aspirations, with her generous hatred of injustice, tyranny, and oppression, bids fair to construct a France which shall be the real and not the illusive home of freedom. The land that can produce men and women like M. Pinard and Madame Coralie Cahen need have no fear of the triumph of decadence. There were nearly seven thousand births during the past year at the *maternité*. When we remember that women are not obliged to give their names, and that their secret is honourably kept in the teeth of all inquiries that may be made, there seems less and less reason to-day for the extremities of despair.

The *Assistance Publique* is not exclusively concerned with hospitals. The increase of its income and the increase of its expenditure sufficiently testify to the extent of public charity in France. In 1834 its income reached 9,946,874 francs, and in 1894, 43,043,935 francs. The number

of patients received in hospitals in 1834 was 66,521, and in 1894, 172,500 ; of children helped in 1834, 21,781, and in 1894, 48,000. It disposes of 11,989 beds in hospitals, 12,370 beds in asylums, and the average of persons helped is 480,600 a year. In outdoor help it spends 11,365,951 francs.

Again to compare the *ancien régime* with the new order of things. It was not until 1660 that the horrors of forsaken childhood obtained commiseration. Yet St. Louis had lived ; more than one king had been called the father of his people, and the good King Henri IV. of legend had asserted his royal wish that each family should have a fowl boiling in the pot. It was the work of St. Vincent of Paul who, after founding the excellent order of Sisters of Charity, bethought himself of unwelcome babes left to suffer the consequences of their parents' fault. Since then the idea has rapidly progressed. In 1881 the *Conseil Général de la Seine* instituted what is greatly superior to the mere animal succour of new-born infancy, the *Service des Moralement Abandonnés*. The morally abandoned ! How much more needful, how much more clamorous for the good of the race, is the succour of these little creatures, morally depraved, from want of training ! In 1888 this society received 2062 boys and 905 girls, the numerical difference being explained by the fact

that there are always more ways of disposing of girls than of boys, and their adoption by private persons is much more frequent.

Too much praise cannot be given to the *Assistance Publique* for the admirable fashion in which it discharges its duty to the children placed under its protection. Zola in *Fécondité* records the improbable tale of a whole town in Normandy living solely upon the slow murder of babies put out to nurse by the institution. I need give only one example of what has come under my own notice. My servant, unfortunately married, was deserted many years ago with three children, one new-born. The Public Assistance took the two elder boys and placed them out to nurse in a farmhouse, where every quarter an inspector visited them, and himself inquired into the condition of their health and general welfare. The inspector makes his report to the prefect, and his visits are supplemented by the doctor's. It is he who signs the agreement of apprenticeship, distributes clothes, and pays the nurses and adopted parents. As an encouragement to treat the children well, these receive a present of money when each child reaches the age of thirteen; an outfit is bestowed upon the child, who is then apprenticed, preferably for farm-work, and, in order that the precious ties of family life shall not be broken, it is invariably exacted that the boys shall

continue to live with their foster parents during the years of apprenticeship. A portion of the boy's earnings is placed in the Caisse d'Épargne to make him a tiny capital, when of age to start upon his own account. My servant's children were well-treated and happy, and when she went down to the farm to spend ten days with them, she found two healthy lads and a hospitable family to receive her, and in their midst enjoyed a delightful holiday. The boys had their pass-books, and could make her a present each of twenty-five francs. The other day one of them decided to come to Paris to earn his bread, and even at the station the mother was not allowed to claim him, it being a notorious fact that boys fresh from the country often fall into evil hands at the big railway stations. Scrupulous in the acquittal of its duties, the *Assistance Publique* will only deliver its charge into the mother's hand in official circumstances that render all fraud impossible. The boy wore a fine new suit of clothes and new boots, and his great fear was that, leaving the care of the *Assistance Publique* these peacock feathers would be taken from him. But they were not, and when he came to see me, I found, instead of a cowed charity lad, a pink-cheeked, open-eyed youth, well dressed and strong, with an independent air and an excellent fashion of speech. I sent him with a card of recommen-

dation to the *Figaro*, and he was engaged on the spot. It speaks well for the people who brought him up, that he already regrets them and their quiet shepherd-life, and says he was much happier in the country than ever he expects to be in Paris. In the case of children leaving the correctional schools, the State has organised several schools of apprenticeship for the young prisoners of both sexes.

There are, as well, a considerable number of these establishments under the direction of private persons and charitable societies. The boys are taught a trade and are classed according to their antecedents, if brought up in town or country. They work seven hours a day, and the money they earn is placed to their account in the Savings Bank. The colony at Belle-Ile-en-Mer receives the pick of this corrupt young world, and trains them for marine service. They are taught reading, writing, history, geography, and arithmetic, while Sunday is given up to gymnastics and long walks with their professors. The rewards for good behaviour are—praise, additional food, good-conduct stripes with pecuniary remuneration, gifts, a grant of three francs a month, confidential employment, and weekly leave of absence, provisional freedom, and military service. The Maison Darnetal for girls, near Rouen, has excited such admiration that the Italian Government has ordered its nuns

to imitate it. Young girls here, when they leave the correctional school, are trained as farm wives, to grow fruit and vegetables, to make butter and cheese, to rear fowl ; and they themselves carry to market the produce of their labour and learn to make excellent bargains. When they have earned their freedom, they are independent young women, capable of directing a farm, with all the thrift, the natural, keen intelligence and unsleeping industry of that most admirable portion of the French race, the hard-working, good-humoured women of the people.

For years past there has been raging in France a bitter war between the Catholics and the Radicals on the subject of hospital nurses. The Republic, which mistrusts the Catholic party, has sought to limit their power in every direction. It was a mistake, I think, to attack them at hospital beds, for if there is a place which belongs by divine right, if I may say so, to the nun, it is the side of a sick-bed. With their guimps and coifs, their life of religious meekness, their cheerfulness and self-abnegation, they make ideal sick nurses. Then, the patient feels that with them it is not a profession, the means to an end, that money is not their object, nor are they likely to forget their duty in a flirtation with the doctor. In England and France I have had, unfortunately, experience of both kinds of nurses, and I unhesitatingly give my preference to the French

nun. She is softer, kinder, gayér, and more delicate and modest in her handling of a patient than the average lady nurse of England. She nurses you for love of nursing, or for the good of her soul, and she has the secret of a boundless sympathy and untiring good-will. Yet many scientific Frenchmen and doctors, while praising her disinterestedness and purity of motive, allow her unsatisfactory peculiarities. For instance, they complain of her indocility to the doctor and surgeon, and state that when a difference of opinion between them and the mother superior arises, the religious sick nurses will obey the latter rather than those in whose hands lies the fate of the patient. Dr. Fauvel, of le Havre, stated before the International Congress of Assistance, relative to the laity of the new hospital of that town : " As regards primary instruction and professional education, the nuns are in no wise superior, quite the contrary ; with an incomplete professional education, the lay staff has shown special knowledge ignored by the nuns, nursing the sick with greater intimate skill, preparing instruments, baths, helping the doctors and pupils more efficiently, being more docile in taking the thousand precautions ordered in operations and the dressing of wounds. . . . It is a mistake to regard as false all the accusations made against the sisters ; and I declare emphatically that I have found in lay nurses an

equal and often a more spontaneous devotion." This is quite possible, but I maintain, upon personal experience of both methods, that the religious atmosphere brings a refinement and delicacy into the sick room by no means to be despised. Whatever throws a charm, a grace, a sweetness over the sick-bed carries an inappreciable value, and Frenchwomen, at least, however religious, have that delightful tact of their race to prevent them from worrying a recalcitrant patient on the subject of her faith.

At Lyons, as early as the fifteenth century, a medium was found between congregational and secular sick-nursing. It appears to work excellently, though the persons in this state affair who deserve our pity are the unfortunate sick nurses, whose sole reward for a life of unceasing labour is the precarious value of fifty low masses after death. I cannot, for the life of me, see why these poor women, so wretchedly paid in life, should not at least enjoy the glory of fifty high masses and a monument. But women who devote themselves to public service are, in all lands, and under every *régime*, ancient or modern, gallantly exploited. It is a recognised duty to overwork them, underfeed them, and pay them next to nothing, and then expect gratitude from them for permitting them to waste their lives in the service of their ungrateful fellow-men. In mediæval times the town of

Lyons decided to profit by the repentance of loose women, and ordered them to attend the sick for the good of their souls. They took no vows, but little by little they adopted a uniform, and, in 1598, a meeting of Lyonese doctors resolved that this lay order of sick nurses should be known as *servants of the poor*. There is such a pretty mediæval twang about this name, that we salute it, still existing in these modern days, with respect. This lay order has existed throughout all the storms of French history, and works as well to-day as when it was founded four centuries ago. True, it is now recruited from quite a different class, and is divided into three terms of service : *novices*, *prétendants*, *sœurs croisées*, or decorated sisters. When a young girl wishes to become a "servant of the poor," she is severely catechised as to the reasons of her choice, is compelled to furnish proofs of her capacity for her chosen task, and the consent of her parents or guardians. Inquiries are made about her, and if she is accepted, her novitiate lasts a year, during which period she wears no uniform. Then she becomes a *prétendant*, and wears a uniform, receiving in payment of her incessant service the sum of eighty francs a year, out of which she must pay for her uniform and linen. She can leave when she likes, or the hospital committee can discharge her for any reason whatever. She obeys a superior nurse,

who in turn obeys the administration, and her period of service lasts from twelve to fifteen years. Imagine her, then, wishful of rest, far away from lint and bistouries and hospital odours. Her £3 4s. a year will not have afforded her much chance of putting anything by. But if, happily, her vocation for unrewarded service lasts, she is decorated with a silver cross; and though she still takes no vows, and can leave when she wishes, she is regarded as having a life-claim upon the administration. They cannot now turn her into the streets, and there is no fear of her dying of hunger. In return for this assurance her salary is reduced to forty francs a year. But she is titled *Cheftaine*, with also its pretty ringing sound of the Middle Ages; she has seventeen days holiday every year, and she has her silver cross and fifty low masses! There are eight hundred of these disinterested creatures in the city of Lyons; and it will be admitted that the great silk centre of France knows how to manage its affairs with prodigious economy.

It would be impossible, in a short chapter dealing with organised philanthropy in France, to mention even a tenth of the private institutions and associations that abound. In Paris alone there are thirty orphanages for boys and a hundred and twenty for girls, the deficiency on the side of the boys being supplied by innumerable

patronages, or boys' clubs. There are forty-three societies for infancy, eighty-seven *crèches*,—an excellent institution invented nearly fifty years ago by M. Marbeau,—two hundred and ten infants' schools, first established by a Protestant clergyman in the Vosges, and now spread all over France. In 1895, 37,253 children were placed in the country, entailing an expense of 9,336,711 francs, and every year the number increases.

Each denomination has its private and organised charities, and the late Maxime du Camp awards the palm of incomparable perfection in this path to the children of Israel. The Rothschild hospital, the Rothschild asylum for old ages of both sexes, the children's school, and school for girls of Madame Coralie Cahen, are the best of their kind in Paris. When one reads the story of Jewish charities in Paris, one is stupefied by the senseless outburst of mad and wicked anti-semitism which rages in France to-day. The Baron Henri de Rothschild has instituted a sort of mothers' refuge up in the poor and populous quarter of Belleville, where he gives advice to mothers, and supplies them with a litre of sterilised milk daily. Believe me, when you dive below the surface of Paris, you will find it to be something nobler than a city of pleasure. Poverty and misery abound because, alas ! they are inseparable from existence ; but there is no city in the world where poverty is more

endurable than in Paris, none where it is sweetened with a surer and more efficacious fraternity. Between the classes there is not that intolerable arrogance and impertinence which constitute the blight of British philanthropy. In England I have seen charitable women go into poor men's cottages with the air of tamers entering a menagerie. They ask unendurable questions, fling open windows without consulting their victims, pooh-pooh everything said to them, order this, command that, till I have marvelled at the long-suffering of the poor, and wondered that they restrained themselves from flinging their torturers out of the window. And I have remarked that these busybodies, under the guise of philanthropy, rarely brought the victims of their implacable sense of Christian duty anything but their arid advice. Now, whatever the failings of the French are, I can confidently assert that tactless spiritual arrogance is not among them, still less an impertinent interference in private matters. They will not open their purse as freely as the English do—the French themselves are the first to admit it—and the secretary of the Academy of Medicine, speaking to me of English private charities, and the vaster scale on which they are managed, said, with delightful gaiety of admission, "In England, you know, you always find a benevolent old lady or gentleman, who will give you for a charitable project £20,000, as I

might give you two sous " ; but they will not thrust their advice upon the poor with wounding contempt as the English do.

If you would obtain the most striking possible contrast of the hospital workings of the old and new *régimes*, comparison should be made of the authentic plan of the old hospital under the kings of France, and the new hospital of the Institut Pasteur under the directorship of M. Duclaux. Under the old system, patients suffering from various maladies, all more or less contagious, lay four in one bed, two with their heads above, two with their heads below, the legs of the four touching. We may imagine the rest of the details in keeping with this frightful situation—sanitary details not improved between the eighth and eighteenth centuries—food, attendance of doctors, surgeons, and nurses of the worst and coarsest kind, sickness not other than a filthy and hideous visitation of destiny, the inevitable precursor of the common ditch of burial. One wonders what degree of physical despair and disgust it was necessary to reach in those days to face the horrors of a public hospital. The courage such awful contact entailed means, to me, greater far than any involved in fronting the vicissitudes of battle. To die untended and forsaken on the bloodiest field of history, with unchanged linen, unwashed and unbound wounds, the visible prey of vultures, without hope of

decent burial, were surely an end more honourable and less nauseous than illness and death in a public hospital of Paris in the much lauded and poetised days of the *ancien régime*.

A well-known charitable institution of France is the order of the Little Sisters of the Poor. These Little Sisters are highly popular, and whenever anyone *bien pensant* (as the Catholics call themselves) dies, his or her relatives hasten to send all the wardrobe of the defunct to the Little Sisters. A branch house is almost beside me, and I see cartloads of clothes driven off frequently for sale from its door. I visited the establishment once, and cannot say that I was much impressed with the spirit of charity revealed to me. To enter this asylum, men and women must have attained the age of sixty. The old men are better cared for, better treated, by the Little Sisters than the old women. The best side of the house is theirs; they have a handsome covered terrace to walk along when they are not in the gardens, have a smoking-room, and can spend their days playing cards. Their quilts are of silk and velvet patchwork, while the old women must be thankful for cotton, and the nun who showed me over the establishment reserved for the men all her smiles and pleasant greetings. The poor old women got nothing but sour looks and silence, and while the men amused themselves, these were

condemned to hard work in the big laundry and kitchen. "As we have no servants," said the nun, "the old women must work." To enter a charitable institution over sixty, having worked hard all one's life, in order to stand over a wash-tub, seems a dubious advantage. A very devout Catholic friend, with whom I discussed this fact, has told me of a lasting grievance she has against these Little Sisters of the Poor. A broken-down gentle old washerwoman, near seventy, in whom she took an interest, was recommended to them, a friend paying four hundred francs to the asylum. The nuns are not supposed to take money, but it is never refused, and in this case the generous donor meant to secure a little extra comfort for the hard-worked old soul. She was put in there to rest from the wash-tub, but the excellent nuns understood it differently, and placed her at once before it. Within a year she died from overwork. Whenever you penetrate below the surface of conventual charities, they will always be found profitable for the order and never for the individual. The hearts of nuns seem implacably steeled against human suffering, steeled against pity and generosity. They are among the worst paymasters and taskmasters in the world, on the pretext that, being hard to themselves, nobody has the right to expect that they shall be soft to others.

The Mont-de-Piété is a civil institution, which exists for the benefit of the needy. It is not in the least like our pawn-offices, for here no usury is practised, and the town benefits by any profits that accrue. The central house is in the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux, and there are four large branch offices. Money is advanced on the objects offered, and when the sum is brought back, interest is charged, and the objects are restored. If no claim is put in at the end of eighteen months, the objects are sold, and the profits are handed over to the *Assistance Publique*. All classes of society in straitened circumstances have recourse to the Mont-de-Piété which is a most useful institution.

Turn now to the latest public edifice for the poor under the Third Republic. The late Baroness de Hirsch, a Jewess, was one of the several founders — all of them women — of this splendid hospital, attached to the Pasteur Institute. Here each patient has a room to himself free on the raised ground-floor or on the story above. Below there are bath-rooms and douches ; there is a workshop for the carding of mattresses, each patient sleeping on a new mattress, each mattress passing through an immense steriliser. To improve upon the old method, by which doctors and surgeons visit the patient at stated hours, a private house of handsome dimensions has been built expressly for the doctor, who must

be always on the spot. In the 'case of contagious sickness there is the process of purification in the lower cells, while ordinary cases of illness are, after the *consultation à la hâte*, despatched to one of the bright, clean, little sick rooms on the ground-floor. Here the rooms are divided by glass partitions, which are muffed or not, as may be required. Grown patients are more likely to wish for the privacy of muffed-glass panels, whereas it is preferable that the panels should be transparent when the patients are children and need constant supervision. During convalescence, the patients, weary of solitude, can seek change by transportation to a public ward, and there is a long glass gallery, or winter garden, well located, and gay with green seats and tables, where they can walk up and down, and receive their friends among the palms and India-rubber trees. This part of the establishment has more the air of a convalescent home than a public hospital. As deaths may occur even in the best regulated hospitals, there is a subterranean passage constructed for the *service des morts*, by which means the living are spared all contact with lugubrious eventualities. M. Duclaux calculates that the yearly expenditure of this admirable institution will reach £20,000. Let us hope that those who profit by this foundation will prove not destitute of good feeling towards those who have spent so much time,

labour, money, science, and thought on their behalf. But, alas ! the poor are essentially mistrustful of public charities. I know not why, but it is, nevertheless, a fact that they seem to labour under the impression that such edifices exist mainly to exploit and defraud them in some mysterious fashion. One would approve of a sentiment of independence, and the conviction of a sacred claim in their usage : but the feeling of distrust of them is ever to be deplored.

It is due, no doubt, to groundless suspicions among the benefited themselves, the flame of discontent being steadfastly and perfidiously fanned by the Catholics, ever yearning for Catholic rule in France, that all sorts of reports are spread as to maladministration of the *Assistance Publique*. The fact is, of course, that centralised state assistance to the poor can never be so cordial, so satisfactory and helpful, as that administered by private hands. The State is a functionary-tyrannised machine, which nobody thanks, and from which everything is expected.





INDEX

ACADÉMIE Française, 147 ; reception of M. Lavedan, 149 ; reception of M. Hervieu, 151 ; its restoration after the Terror, 154 ; its influence and mission, 155 ; prizes, 158

Affaire Dreyfus, 88, 93, 101, 126, 220, 237

Alsace and Lorraine, 102

Angoulême, 214

Anti-Semitism, 26, 53, 151

Aristocracy, 47 ; its disaffection, 50 ; the old-fashioned aristocrat, 55, 56 ; the modern rowdy aristocrat, 52, 56, 75, 259

Army, 87 ; its attitude, 90 ; its popularity, 91 ; the perils of militarism, 94 ; conscription, 94 ; a military document, 95 ; military service, 99 ; attitude of officers in civil courts, 101 ; M. Urbain Gohier's indictment of the army, 103, 104 ; military plays, 105 ; French generals, 108 ; military rewards, 109 ; *Au Tableau*, 110

Artisan, 219, 244

Assistance Publique, 284 ; contrast of the state of the poor in Paris under the *ancien régime* and under the Third Republic, 284, 285, 288-292, 300

Aubernon, Madame, 257

Aversier, 17

BACCALAURÉAT, 116

Balzac, 148, 205

Barrès, Maurice, 103, 156

Bazin, René, *La Terre qui Meurt*, 106, 205, 227

Béarn, 3

- Blaguer, 255
 Blaze de Bury, Madame, 178
 Bodinière, 252
 Bon Pasteur, 225
 Bourgeoisie, the, 60; its provincial pretensions, 5; its prejudices, 63-65; its passion for titles, 66; the "little bourgeoisie," 264-274
 Bourget, Paul, 51
 Breton, 2; Breton superstitions, 19
 Brisson, M., 256
 Brunetière, M., 53, 152, 156, 159

 CATHOLICISM, the cult of St. Anthony of Padua, 18; hostility to the Republic, 89; its influence, 128
 Charbonnel, Victor, 252
 Châteaux, 9, 21, 22
 Child service, 223
 Clericalism, 27
 Comédie Française, 161; its traditions, 161; its composition, 163; the new theatre, 164
 Concierge, 277, 278
 Conférence, la, 250
 Conservatoire, 170-172
 Convent life, 139-146
 Country life, 5, 6, 25
 Coppée, François, 103, 157, 236

 DAUDET, Alphonse, 172, 233
 Demolins, M., 70, 113, 115, 117, 120
 Duclaux, M., 241, 300, 304
 Duruy, Georges, 104

 ÉCOLE des Beaux Arts, 164
 École Polytechnique, 104
 Education, 112
 England and France contrasted, 34, 37-42, 59, 65, 76, 118, 121, 167, 197, 206, 232

- Environments of Paris, 82
Estaunié, M., *L'Empreinte*, 123, 127
- FABRE, Ferdinand, 124
Fairs, 82
Farmer, 12
Fashionable Paris, 53
Faubourg St. Germain, 35, 50, 54, 55
Fiction, 118
Flats, 39
Flower markets, 43
- GALLIFET, General de, 108
Geoffrin, Madame, 256
Gouvernantes, 137
Grisette, 248, 274
Gyp, 50, 137, 259
- HALÉVY, Ludovic and Daniel, 241
Halles, the, 43
Hirsch, Baroness de, 303
Hobereaux, 8-12
Home life, 55 ; its economies and courtesies, 179, 188 ; French
table, 193, 194 ; home habits, 197
Hospitals, 285, 298, 300
Hugo, Victor, 263
- Jacquou le Croquant*, 124
Jeanne of Angoulême, 214, 520
Jesuits, 123 ; their mission and training, 124-127
Jeunesse Royaliste, 1a, 46
Journal des Débats, 231, 234
Journal d'une Femme de Chambre, 213-215, 234
- LARROUMET, Gustave, 254
Lemaître, Jules, "Ligue de la Patrie Française," 156, 157, 236
Le Vieux Marcheur, 148-150, 225

- "Little bourgeoisie," the, 264-274
 "Little people," 226, 264, 273, 274, 281
 Little Sisters of the Poor, 301, 302
 Lycées, 113-122

 MAISON Darnetal, 292
 Marais, the, 31
 Marchand de Vin, 245
 Maternité, the, 285-287
 Métayer, 227
 Minister: Waldeck-Rousseau, 230, 237, 240
 Molière, 255, 262
 Mont-de-Piété, 393
 Montmartre, 32, 38, 85, 248
 Morality, 38, 42; influences of public-school training, 117; the moral training of Stanislas College, 130-137; tolerance of vice, 176; feminine cynicism, 177; the Frenchman's vices, 198
 Motor cars, 60, 61

 NAPOLEON, 46, 87, 110, 117, 154, 163, 234, 263
 Nationalists, 75, 78, 79, 103, 220, 231, 236, 237
 Nurses, religious and lay, 287, 293, 294

 ORLEANS, DUC D', 54, 91, 260

 PARIS and Parisianism, 28-57; the gaiety and charm of Paris, 29; the influence of women, 32; the old streets of the Faubourg St. German, 35; inoffensiveness of the streets, 38; rents, 39; walks, 41; markets, 43; Parisianism, 47; aristocratic Paris, 50; the old-fashioned noblewomen, 54, 55; Parisian washerwomen, 220-222
 Pastimes, 80-86
 Patriotism, 80, 103, 236
 Peasant, the, 202, 215, 228
 Pellouaille, La, 202-205
 People's colleges, 238-244

- Philanthropy, 283, 298
Pinard, M., 285-288
Press, 229-235
Prix de Rome, 166, 167
Public ball, 246, 247

RAG-PICKER, 278-280
Renan, 258, 263

SAINTE-BEUVE, 153, 155, 158
Sand, George, 205
"Servants of the poor," 295-297
Stanislas College, 128-135

TAINE, 179
Temps, Le, 231, 233, 234

VOGÜÉ, M. DE, *Les Morts qui Parlent*, 225

WOMAN'S rôle, 200, 201

ZOLA, M., 156, 205, 213

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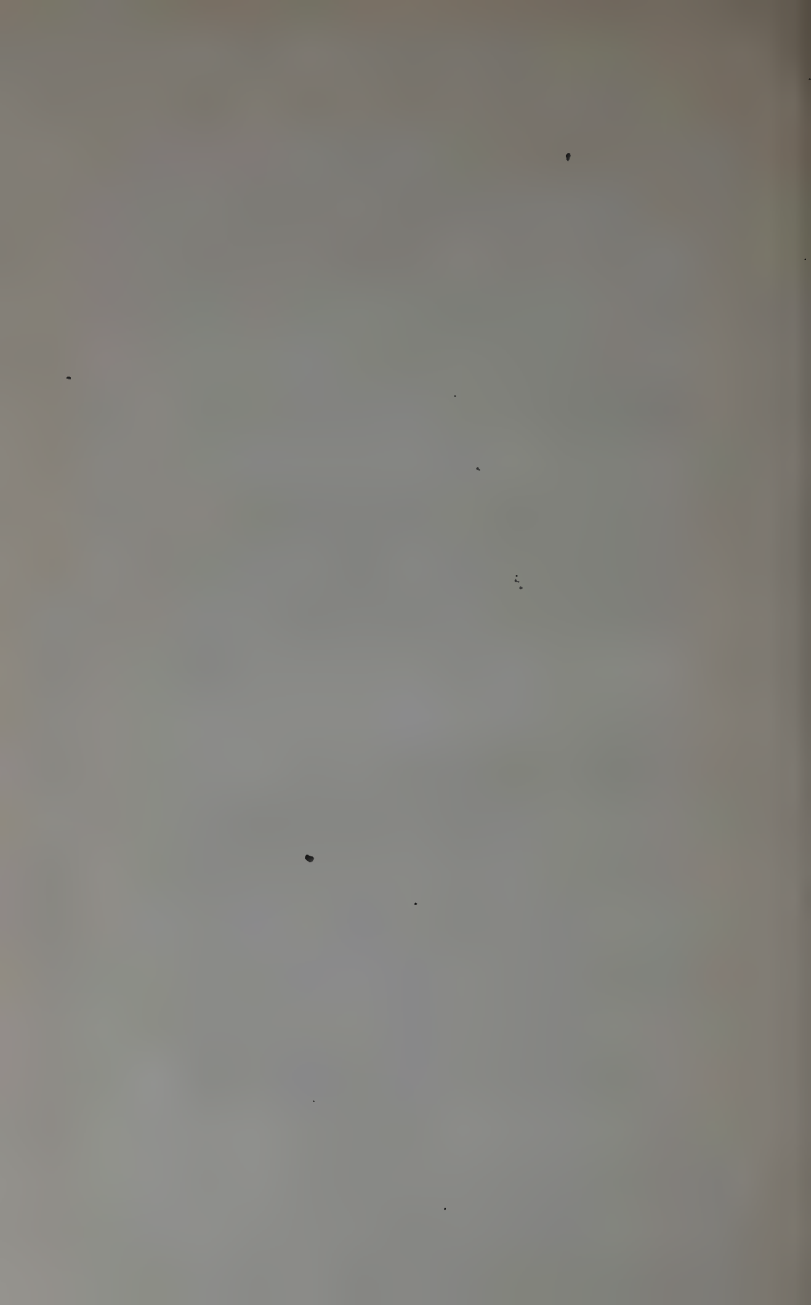
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